

The Continuing Threat Of Anti-ism

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The doctrines of men have always been a threat to the church of Christ and to her precious unity. Paul warned the Ephesian elders that certain men would bring divisive doctrines into the church. He said, “For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:28-30). These men divided the church with their perverse doctrines. They drew the disciples away from the truth by teaching religious error. When the church is divided over the teachings of men—souls will inevitably be lost. This should be viewed as a threat of tremendous proportion.

Living the Christian life is somewhat like driving an automobile down a narrow road. The car must stay on the road to reach its destination. Heaven is the church’s destination (Ephesians 5:23). The way that leads to heaven is both strait and narrow. Jesus said, “Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” (Matthew 7:14). If a driver does not focus upon the road he will veer in one of two directions (either to the left or to the right) and crash into one of the ditches. Likewise, to stay in the narrow way, the Christian must follow the doctrine of Christ.

Jesus spoke to spoke of the ditches and who would fall into them: “Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch” (Matthew 15:14). Again in Luke 6:39 He spake a parable and said, “... Can the blind lead the blind? Shall they not both fall into the ditch?” According to Jesus, a person can be spiritually blinded, venture away from the truth, crash into a spiritual ditch and lose their soul. Only the Lord knows how many have met this fate over the centuries.

There are four distinct options for every man and (or) every religious group:

1. do only what the word of God says,
2. add something to the word of God,
3. subtract something from the word of God, or
4. both add and subtract what the Bible says.

All of the options, except the first, are eternally fatal. Notice the following warning:

For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in the book” (Revelation 22:18-19).

Clearly, heaven is not a possibility to those that tamper with God’s word. The Lord’s church is continuously facing these dangers and, according to Paul, has been from the very beginning.

Teaching and practicing what cannot be found in the Holy Scriptures is commonly seen in religion today. People add to the scriptures when they use instruments of music in worship to God. The only thing the New Testament authorizes man to do is to sing, not sing and play a piano (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). Men have invented clergy systems in the church that cannot be found in the Holy Scriptures, such as popes, archbishops, reverends and one-man pastors. Men have made allowances for both women preachers and homosexual preachers. Where do we find authorization for women preachers? The Bible tells women to keep silent and not to have authority over men (1 Corinthians 14:34-35; 1 Timothy 2:11-15). The Bible condemns homosexuality (fornication) from the front to the back cover and yet some religions accept it (Genesis 19; Leviticus 18:22; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11). These are a few of the ways we see men taking liberties with God's inspired word.

Men also subtract from God's word. Some subtract baptism from the plan of salvation, saying that baptism is not necessary to be saved. Only spiritual blindness would cause one to miss the fact that Jesus required it for salvation (Mark 16:16), it is for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16), it puts one into Christ (Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:27) and it saves (1 Peter 3:21). It is impossible to be saved without baptism just as it is impossible to be saved without having faith in God (Hebrews 1:6). It is unholy to be taking anything from God's.

These kinds of things are happening everywhere in religion. They are a continuing threat to the church. Entire congregations are presently being corrupted. Universities that were, in the past, considered doctrinally sound are now promoting these same extremes. A major split in our brotherhood is now underway because of liberalistic practices. The split is between those who are remaining loyal to the ancient order of the Bible and those who desire to change the face of the Lord's church through liberal theology. Liberalism is a threat to the church and ultimately to the salvation of precious souls. Error has never saved one soul from hell and never will (John 8:32). This is the reason we must speak out against it and oppose it in every scriptural way.

Anti-ism makes laws where God has made none. The many doctrines of antism forbid Christians from practicing what the Gospel does allow. For example, one brand of anti-ism says that it is sinfully wrong to conduct more than one Bible class on the occasions when the elders call the church together for teaching. They are opposed to having more than one Bible class at a time. The buildings where they worship are typically void of classroom facilities. They do not conduct a Bible class program for the various ages of children in their congregation. It is their belief that to do so would be not only wrong, but sinful also. Let me say this, it is not wrong for a congregation to forego having divided Bible classes. It is not obligatory for a local congregation to conduct Bible classes for it to be scripturally correct.

The problem arises when those that do not believe in divided Bible classes begin to forbid anyone else from having a Bible school program in the local congregation. When people do this they are making laws where God has made none. They are attempting to bind on earth what God has not bound in heaven. God has authorized the teaching of His word (Matthew 28:18-20; John 6:44-45; 2 Timothy 3:15; Hebrews 5:12). Not only that, but it is God's will that people be taught the word. The Bible class program does not hinder God's will from being accomplished; rather it is an expedient process by which it is fulfilled.

Anti-ism has caused many deep divisions in the Lord's church. The divisions are a direct result of brethren binding on others what God has not bound. Their divisive doctrines are unscriptural (John 17:20-21; Romans 16:17-18; 1 Corinthians 1:10-13). Everywhere the Gospel has gone in this world both liberalism and anti-ism has followed causing harm, hurt and hindrances to the cause of Christ. Only in eternity will we know how many congregations have been divided over these two extremes and how many souls have been lost.

Since error seldom disappears on its own, there is no reason why we should believe that these erroneous views of anti-ism will vanish in time. History shows that once a false religious idea starts someone will perpetuate it. Take for example Roman Catholicism, since the appointing of the first pope in the seventh century they have done nothing but proliferate. Error seldom disappears all by itself. Another example is Mormonism. It began in the early 1800's and continues to thrive in membership to this day. Islam has existed for centuries and is currently growing in America by leaps and bounds. Anti-ism is no different. It will continue to be a threat in the future of the Lord's church as it has been in the past. We have not seen the last congregation divided over issues related to anti-ism. Only on the day of judgment will all religious error cease.

Another doctrine that has divided churches is the idea that it is unscriptural to set up a home for orphan children. These have generally been known as *noninstitutional* churches or *anti-orphan home*. They oppose the use of money from the church treasury being sent to house, feed, cloth and medically treat orphaned children.. They would also be opposed to supporting widows in the same way. This erroneous doctrine has divided many churches over the years.

The book of James tells us, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27). It is clear that the Lord wants the helpless to be helped. However, we are informed by the noninstitutional folk that it is wrong for the church to build a home for children and to support them from its treasury. They contend that Christians should individually take orphans or widows into their own homes and care for them there. It is their view that this is the responsibility of individual Christians and not the church. Certainly it would not be wrong to carry out the will of God in this manner, but there is no principle or command that would deny having a home where a dozen or more individuals could be housed for the same purpose. This doctrine is a continuing threat to the unity of the church.

Another brand of anti-ism is seen in those who oppose church cooperation. They allege that congregation A and B cannot send money to congregation C while the latter congregation oversees the work that all are financially supporting. One of the reasons for opposing such cooperation between congregations is said to be that one congregation loses its autonomy (right to govern itself). In Acts 11:26-30, 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8-9 and in Romans 15:26 we read of money being collected from various congregations in Macedonia and Achaia and being sent to the church in Judea. This collection was being promoted and encouraged by Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ. There is nothing unscriptural about this practice. The anti-cooperation position will continue to be a threat to the unity of the church.

Yet another anti position imposes the use of only one drinking cup in partaking of the Lord's Supper. They stand adamantly oppose to any use of multiple communion cups in distribution of

the fruit of the vine. This is yet another position over which division has resulted in the Lord's church. The using of multiple cups reportedly began in the late 1890's. The one cup became such a tradition in the minds of some that they believed there was a scriptural basis for it. So when congregations began to use multiple cups it caused splits in the church. From that time a new doctrine began to be taught. Those opposed to using multiple cups began to teach that the one cup in worship represented the one covenant of Christ (the New Testament). Division occurred over this issue and the division remains to this day.

Another anti group is opposed to food and drink being consumed in the church building. They use 1 Corinthians 11:22,34 as their proof text. They have a problem being consistent because they allow some eating and drinking in the church building. They allow a water fountain in their buildings and they also allow babies to be fed there as well. I understand that during the week, the preacher eats his lunch in the preacher's office. Brethren, there is nothing wrong with babies eating in the building or preachers either for that matter. Nothing wrong with drinking water in the meeting house of the church. First century Christians often worshiped regularly in private homes where eating took place each and every day (Romans 16:3-5; Philemon 2). Besides, the church is not "the building" where saints meet. The church is the people that meet in that building or house or whatever the structure is. When you eat in the building you are not eating in the church. And who says that the church cannot eat together? It is on the inspired record that the New Testament under the authority of the apostles ate meals together (Acts 2:46; 20:11). Sadly this issue still hinders the unity of the Lord's church.

There are yet other anti groups that require a head covering for women inside the church building. Others are opposed to the church having a kitchen in the church building. They do not believe the Lord's money should be used to purchase such things. Others are opposed to financially helping any non-Christian from the church treasury. They believe this to be against the teaching of the scriptures and is therefore a sin. They oppose even the buying of one loaf of bread to feed hungry children if that bread is purchased with money from the funds of the church.

Conclusion

It is truly incredible how many of these anti doctrines have developed over the years. I am sure we have not seen the end of them. There will likely to be more divisions over similar issues. The devil has not retired. Some of these practices are not wrong in and of themselves. For example, there is nothing sinful about women wearing a covering on their head in the assemblies of the church. It is not a transgression of the scriptures to abstain from eating in the meetinghouse of the church. But, it is wrong to make a law where God has made none. It is wrong to make a law that women must wear a head covering. It is wrong to say you cannot have divided Bible class, and thus say something the scriptures do not say. It is wrong to divide the church over matters of opinion and not matters of faith. This is the threat of anti-ism.