

Unity or Ecumenism?

Most would agree that the western church has largely lost its authority and witness to the world. We are in the midst of one of the most radical periods of apostasy the church has ever seen. Most denominations simply do not teach what they used to teach, even just 10-20 years ago! They have adopted the ecumenical cry of unity at all costs, and at the expense of truth and doctrine. They say that to be a 'witness' to the world we must join together as one and so have a 'testimony' to the unsaved. But this has been at the expense of truth by watering down the word of God and the Gospel, the very vessels which hold that truth in written form. There can be no 'unity' unless it is unity in the Word of God, (Jn.17).

Discerning Christians know something is wrong when the church becomes more and more like the world and less holy and distinct. Discerning Christians should know that something is wrong when churches place less emphasis on doctrine and more emphasis on programmes feeding the felt needs of the unsaved. The world has come into the church to take the church into the world. The Bible warns discerning Christians to be separate from teaching that is not Biblical: ***'Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you have learned; and avoid them'***, (Rom.16:17). The phrase ***'contrary to the doctrine which you have learned'*** is referring to the apostles doctrine and that early 'faith'.

'Church growth' leaders today teach a philosophy that says we give the unsaved what they want or need, so as to effectively present the gospel to them. But the Bible says that the average unsaved person is naturally going to ask for carnal things and reject spiritual things. He is not going to ask for the Gospel, nor want to listen to it. He will not want Godly music or teaching on the judgement of God. His heart is depraved and the Gospel is an 'offense' to him, (Gal.5:11; Rom.9:33; 5:15-20). Unsaved man is totally unable of himself to respond spiritually to God's Gospel, (Rom.8:6,7; 1Cor.2:14; Rom.3:10-11; Jer.17:9; Is.64:6,7). Unless the Holy Spirit turns and draws the heart, none will be saved, (Jn.6:44). What 'method' does God use to change a persons heart in this way, from one that is unwilling to receive the things of God to one that is ready? Ultimately, God uses only the Gospel and His Word to save a person! He does not need or use man's methods, felt needs, market driven programmes, etc. Some of these things may be human 'ice breakers' at best to gain relationships, but ultimately it is only the Gospel of *faith* and *repentance* that will move the hearts of the unsaved, who by nature will not seek God! (Rom.3:10,11).

What unsaved people *need* and what they *want* are two totally different things! What they *need* is to understand the Gospel and be saved; what they *want* is their religious or felt needs met. If the needs of the unsaved determine the method or the message of the church then we have backslidden from the methods and the message of the apostles and the early church. Is it thus any wonder the church has become 'salt without savour', (Matt.5:134)? *If the needs of the unsaved determine the method or the message of the church then the inevitable result will be that the Gospel will be diluted and doctrine will be put on the back burner!* Biblical preaching will not be the focus of church services. People will not be challenged to be saved, or the saints to change.

'Doctrine' is 'teaching' and it is this that equips the

saints to discern the difference between pure and impure, truth from error. Any unity based on minimising doctrine is a bastardised unity, a counterfeit. We are not unified by coming together with different beliefs, different gospels or gospels that minimise or do not mention sin, repentance and that Jesus is the *only* way to eternal life. How can we accept a religion that does not teach these basics?; how can we accept a religion that curses us for teaching faith alone and that God's righteousness is imputed to us by faith alone? Yet that is exactly what happens when we unite in any way with religions such as Roman Catholicism! (Roman Catholicism 'curses' any who teach the imputed righteousness of God by faith alone, (Rom.4).

Unity must be centred on and maintained by the Gospel and contending for its purity. Paul exhorted the Philippians to ***'...stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel'***, (Phil.1:27). The book of Philippians is filled with passages that show Paul's passion to *contend* for the gospel. He was imprisoned for this!

True unity must include the truths of who Jesus is (deity) and what he has done (atonement) as the *only* ***'way, the truth and the life'***, (Jn.14:6). True unity means not being ashamed of the gospel and its 'offence' of the cross to the unsaved. True unity does not try to mix the philosophies of the world with the methods of the church and evangelism.

Did Paul promote unity when he rebuked the Galatians for changing the Gospel? The answer is *yes!* By correcting and refuting, he was attempting to keep the unity of 'the faith once delivered'. He warned of 'another jesus, another gospel and another spirit', (2Cor.11:3,4; Gal.1:6-9).

Today churches are increasingly preaching a message of *'come to Jesus and you will have a better life...a better marriage...you will have your needs met, you will find purpose or success in your life...'* But these are not the Gospel. Any Roman Catholic, Jehovah Witness or Mormon could adopt this gospel! The Gospel is not fitted for the liking of the world. It is an 'offense' that Jesus died for our sins and that he was buried and rose, claiming to be the only one by which any can be saved and come to the Father. He alone satisfied the wrath and judgement of God upon sin and sinners. The Gospel is about the work of Christ, as designed by God from the foundation of world. It is not merely to give people a better life on earth but to appease the anger of God and to make a way for us to live free of judgement from a holy God! The true Gospel is about God reconciling sinners to Himself who were once his 'enemies', (Rom.5:8-10). Churches that do not preach this Gospel are not promoting Christian unity! The Gospel says *'repent and believe'*. If repentance is not preached, unity is not achieved.

Other attacks on unity are those teachings which add to the 'faith once delivered'. The Charismatic/Pentecostal movement in the early 20th Century was an *addition* to the faith once delivered with new teachings never before heard of in 1800 years. Yet it is today one of the movements that drives the ecumenical bus. Pastors and elders today are amiss in not warning their sheep where necessary of the ecumenical movement and its merging of different gospels.

Those who strive and contend for the accuracy of the Gospel are true friends of Christian unity.

Terry Arnold