

## Ecumenical Arguments Answered

### **What is the ‘ecumenical church’?**

As a young Christian in the 1980’s and early 90’s, I remember many churches were warning strongly against the ecumenical movement by stating that the Bible revealed such would arise in the last days. *Today many of those same churches are wholly ecumenical!* They no longer take a stand against the doctrines of Roman Catholicism and as well eagerly embrace all denominations as if they were within the Christian orbit. Apparently the Reformation was all a huge mistake. Biblical ‘separation’ is scorned. Admixtures are tolerated. The ecumenical church quickly absorbs and promotes the latest in new church programmes such as the *Emergent* or *40 Days of Purpose* fads. They do this using little to no discernment. The ecumenical church leaders rarely, if ever, preach on sin and repentance.

The ecumenical church is already here with us. Every town I visit I find most churches are ecumenical. They come in an array of denominations, yet in reality they are singing from the same sheet - *union in love, rather than unity in Biblical truth*. ‘Ministers Fraternal’ have Roman Catholic priests as prominent members who shake hands in fellowship and pray with so called ‘Protestant’ ministers. It seems such ministers don’t do much ‘*protesting*’ these days. Ministers play politics to ensure they continue their ministries to schools and the community. In doing this they find it essential to attend these fraternal to be seen praying and fellowshiping with those who preach a false gospel. Many of those they ‘fraternise’ with do not even hold the Bible as inerrant let alone teach from it. Many arguments are used for this co-habitation of strange birds.

### ***...But the Catholics also believe in Jesus as saviour and Lord...***

This is a relatively new late 20th century argument. It can be directly attributed to the ‘decisional regeneration’ doctrines of ecumenism. But there are also cults that hold Christ as a ‘saviour’. The ‘Christ’ of Rome bears little resemblance to the one portrayed in Scripture. As an ex Roman Catholic, and eventually a ‘Charismatic Catholic’, I too believed in Jesus as ‘saviour and Lord’ and ‘gave my heart’ to him many times! But I was simply not *Born Again!*

If Roman Catholicism is Christian then why do they pronounce ‘anathemas’ (curses) upon those who hold to the doctrines of Faith alone, Christ alone, Scripture alone and the ‘imputed’ righteousness of God through Christ? Rome insists that faith and the sacraments are necessary for salvation. Their ‘anathemas’ include: ‘*If anyone says that by the said sacraments...grace is not conferred through the work worked but that faith alone...is sufficient for obtaining the grace, let him be anathema [cursed]*’ (Trent Session 7, canon 8) (This contradicts Eph.2:8,9); ‘*If anyone says that the sacraments...are not necessary for salvation but...men obtain from God through faith alone the grace of Justification...let him be anathema [Cursed].*’ (Canon 4, Session7); ‘*If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone...let him be anathema [cursed].*’ (Canon 9, Session 6); ‘*If anyone shall say that justifying faith ...remits sins for Christ’s sake...let him be anathema [cursed].*’ (6th Session, Canon 12) ; ‘*If anyone says that men are justified...by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ alone...let him be anathema [cursed].*’ (Trent Session 6 canon 11); ‘*If anyone says that the guilt is remitted to every penitent sinner after the grace of justification has been received, and that the debt of eternal punishment is so blotted out that there remains no debt of temporal punishment to be discharged either in this world or in the next in Purgatory...let him be anathema [cursed]*’ (Trent Sess.6, canon 30).

All these curses were re-affirmed in the Vatican II Council of the 20th Century.

*In direct contradiction Romans chapter 4:5 teaches: ‘But to him that works not, but believes on him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness’. Here the Bible teaches: 1. The Justified does not work 2. The Justified trusts only 3. The Justified trusts on ‘Him’ 4. The Justified sees himself as ‘ungodly’ 5. His faith is seen ‘counted’ (credited, imputed) for righteousness.*

Catholicism teaches that *'sins must be expiated. This may be done on this earth through the sorrows, miseries and trials...Otherwise expiation must be made in the next life through fire and torments or purifying punishments...in Purgatory the souls...are cleansed after death with punishments designed to purge away their debt.' (Vatican II ID; 1:2) This flatly contradicts the following Scriptures: Jn.19:30; Heb.10:18; 1Jn.1:7; Lk.16:19-31.*

Roman Catholicism also elevates Mary to a position far superior to what is described in Scripture. She is held as 'sinless', 'co-mediator' and 'co-redemptrix'. Then there is the 'Mass' which openly sacrifices Jesus afresh daily on all their altars. This of course makes a mockery of Hebrews chapter 6 and 10 which says He was sacrificed '**ONCE**'. It is impossible to '**crucify to themselves the son of God afresh**' (Heb.6:6). The sacrifice of Jesus was '**once...Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many**' (Heb.9:26-28). '**We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all**' (10:10).

If all this from Rome is not 'another gospel', then what is?

### ***To be a 'witness' to the world we must join together as one...***

I am all for unity. I reject sectarianism, isolationism and any other label that teaches any unbiblical or extreme form of separation. But if being a 'witness to the world' means I join with those who present another Gospel, or those who do not believe that the Bible is the very Word of God, and is sufficient for our teaching and for sound doctrine, then I would be betraying the very foundation of Christianity itself! Doing so violates the very concept of holiness, which runs through the entire length of the Bible! Separation is another word for holiness or Sanctification. Sanctification is separation *from* something (sin and the thinking of the world) and separating *to* something, (the Lord and His Word). Separation means to *have no fellowship with*. Fellowship is mixing with, partaking with, joining with, sharing with. This doctrine begins in Genesis and then is quickly illustrated with the Israelites where the people were told to be '**different**' to other people (Lev.20:23-26).

If 'unity' is attempted at the expense of truth and the watering down of the Gospel and the Word of God, then it is not unity in 'Truth'! There can be no real 'unity' of disparate and contradictory doctrine. The Bible clearly teaches unity through '**truth**' and that truth is found only in the Word of God. '**Sanctify them through your truth: your word is truth**' (Jn.17:17).

Scripture 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' of that early 'faith'.

What 'method' does God use to change a person's heart from one that is unwilling to receive the things of God to one that is ready to do so? God uses only the Gospel and His Word to draw the elect to Himself. He does not present a 'union' of different faiths or doctrines! Any unity based on minimising doctrine is a bastardised unity, a counterfeit.

Unity must be centred on, and maintained by, the Biblical Gospel in all 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 authentic Gospel even to the point of imprisonment for doing so!

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 (Rom.1:16) or its Cross of 'offence' (Gal.5:11) which convicts those who are perishing.

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**' (Gal.1:6-9; 2Cor.11:3,4).

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.

### ***But what about John 17?...***

***'...that they may be one, as we are...17 Sanctify them through your truth: your word is truth...21 That they all may be one; as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 ...that they may be one, even as we are one'.***

This passage, if read in context, is actually about the preservation of the saints and the unity they have by sanctification 'through the truth', which is found only in the Word of God (vs.17). Scripturally, sanctification is literally a *separation* from the world and sin. The unity spoken of here is '***as you, father, are in me***' (vs.21) and '***as we are one***' (vs.22). This is the unity of the Trinity - a unity of one purpose, one doctrine, one faith, one truth! Is that the kind of 'unity' the ecumenical movement has today?

Charles Spurgeon commented on this passage: '*The mood of the moment is unity...a chorus of ecumenical voices keep harping the unity tune. What they are saying is, 'Christians of all doctrinal shades and beliefs must come together in one visible organisation, regardless...Such teaching is false, reckless and dangerous. Truth alone must determine our alignments. Truth comes before unity. Unity without truth is hazardous. Our Lords prayer in Jn 17 must be read in full context. Look at verse 17: 'Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth'. Only those sanctified through the word can be one in Christ. To teach otherwise is to betray the Gospel.'*

### ***But joining together - it will help the Gospel...***

Such Pragmatism is answered by: '***Let us do evil, that good may come...***'? (Rom.3.8). This text is rhetorical and demands a negative answer. We do not contradict the unity of truth through the word so as to bring about some ecumenical 'good'. Ecumenism is pragmatic by nature. Pragmatism says that methods do not affect the message. Yet the ecumenical gospel has been watered down over many decades. It will draw in others of different doctrines and faiths to achieve its end. It is geared towards gaining numbers by 'method'. Modern pragmatism does not embrace the doctrine of separation.

### ***But was not Jesus with sinners, publicans, and tax collectors?...***

Jesus was a friend to them, (Matt.11:19; Lk.7:34). But in every instance they came to Him! (Matt.9:10 '***And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples***' (see also Mk.2:15; Lk.5:29;15:1). He never fellowshiped with them. He ministered *to* them but did not minister or fellowship *with* them. '***For such a high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens***' (Heb.7:26). Many Christians confuse 'fellowship' with 'friendship'. We are free to have friendships with the unregenerate and those adhering to unbiblical notions - but we are not to endeavour to have our beliefs 'agree' with theirs.

### ***Scriptures the ecumenical movement ignores:***

Romans 16:17 '***Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you have learned; and avoid them***'.

This surely includes false doctrine, false teachers and false prophets; and those who teach extra Biblical revelation in visions, dreams and unknown 'tongues'. It would include many of the hyper-faith and TV preachers. Yet the ecumenical church welcomes these into their fold.

2Thessalonians 3:6 '***Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walks disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us...14 And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. 15 Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.***'

Separation here is to be over serious doctrinal issues, (affecting salvation, deity, Godhead, the Word of God...fornication, etc), not interpretations on minor issues.

2Corinthians 6:14-17 ***'Be you not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion has light with darkness? And what concord has Christ with Belial? or what part has he that believes with an infidel? 16 And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? for you are the temple of the living God; as God has said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be you separate, says the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you'***.

We cannot have fellowship or be yoked with those who have false doctrine, including false religions in the ecumenical movement, false teachers (and false prophets), unsaved people, or uncleanness, unrighteousness, or disobedient brethren.

1Corinthians 5:7, 9-14 ***'Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as you are unleavened.' ...8 ...the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. 9 'I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: 10 Yet not altogether the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must you needs go out of the world. 11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater...'***

## **Conclusion**

The ecumenical movement is an intricate part of the philosophy of the world. It is a 'union' of vital differences instead of a unity in truth. When the differences are to do with the Gospel and the Word of God, they are non-negotiable in the eyes of God!

The ecumenical movement has been greatly enhanced by the liberal, modernistic and Pentecostal/Charismatic movements. Most of these churches are ecumenical. The ecumenical movement openly adopts the word 'oikoumenikos' (as seen on various ecumenical websites). Yet this word is in fact the opposite to the word for 'church' - 'ekklesia'! The dictionary meaning for 'oikoumenikos' is 'a union of the inhabited world; an earthly thing', as opposed to 'ekklesia' (the called out ones). *Christ's true church is not a union in 'oikoumenikos' but a unity of truth in 'ekklesia'*.

Pastors and elders today are amiss in not warning their sheep where necessary of the ecumenical movement and its merging of different gospels. Christians will one day stand before Christ at the Bema seat. Who would want to stand there having been popular with the world, the church of the world, having compromised with His truth in His word or having refused to separate from error because of an ecumenical 'love' - a love without truth?

God promises to bless the *separated*. ***'Blessed is the man that walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law does he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he does shall prosper'*** (Ps.1:1-3).

Today most churches embrace ecumenical programmes and ventures. They will protest against immoral changes in society. But where is the protesting that used to be in the word 'protestant'? It was the Protestant Reformation which gave the people the Bible back in their own language at the cost of millions of martyrs! To be protesting now by being separate from the ecumenical movement is today to be called 'legalistic', 'separatist', 'isolationist' and other names which are used in derogative fashion. But such judgement by men is far more tolerable than the judgement by God. For we will be judged by His Word: ***'He that rejects me, and receives not my words, has one that judges him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day'*** (Jn.12:48). Those who strive and contend for the accuracy of the Gospel are true friends of Christian unity.

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