

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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God is Not the Author of Confusion!

Some have a tendency to blame God for all the religious confusion that exists among churches. The apostle Paul told the Corinthians, "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints" (1 Corinthians 14:33). Jesus prayed for unity among men when he said, "That they all may be one; as thou, Father art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:21).

Confusion Hinders

Religious confusion hinders the work of conversion as men view the divided condition among churches. As Jesus prayed for unity, he appealed for unity on the grounds "that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:21). Unity helps the world to believe the claim of Christ, that he was the Son of God. The non-Christian gets to thinking that, if the folks who are supposed to be religious and study the Bible can't agree, who am I to think that I can understand it! Thus that person makes no attempt to study and understand the Word of God. We all need to get our act together.

The Bible Says the Same to All Churches

You would think by what men teach that the Bible says as many different things as there are churches. Does the Bible say one thing to the Methodist Church and something different to the Baptist Church, then something entirely different to the church of Christ? Who can believe that the Bible teaches all the different doctrines held and taught by men. Paul taught the same thing everywhere he preached. "For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church" (1 Corinthians 4:17). Can you imagine the apostle Paul teaching one church of Christ one thing and something entirely different to another as he preached the Word of God? Have you ever thought about the fact that whatever the Bible says to you, it says to me and whatever it says to me, it says to you! Take the subject of music in worship. Paul said,

"Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:19). What one is told to do, all are told to do. If one is told to sing, all are; if one is told to play a mechanical instrument of music, all are told to play a mechanical instrument of music. If not, why not?

Truth Is Consistent

Truth is consistent with Truth. Only error is inconsistent. I have read religious articles or the creeds of men and many of them contradict themselves, sometimes even on the same page on the same subject! No wonder Jesus said, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). Of course you remember, "Thy word is truth" (John 17:17). Every subject in the Bible harmonizes with everything said on that subject. Sometimes men think they see contradictions in the Word of God, but that's their problem of not having the ability to harmonize difficult passages. I must not accuse God of being a God of confusion just because I do not have the ability to see the harmony of the Scriptures!

The Problem

The problem that causes men to be confused and teach so many different things is the lack of proper study. Paul told Timothy, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). To study is to put forth the effort and be diligent in an honest investigation of the Word of God, realizing that we are dealing with the greatest book which has ever been written! If one can rightly divide the word of truth, he can just as well wrongly divide it, and most seem to do a lot of wrongly dividing! Properly studying the Bible is hard work. And most people don't like hard work. The wise man said, ". . . of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh" (Ecclesiastes 12:12).

The Bible Can Be Understood

The Bible is written in such a way as to be understood by those who honestly seek to do what it says. The key to understanding the Word of God is to be of such a disposition that when you find out what it says, you are willing to do it. Jesus said, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself" (John 7:17). Paul told the Ephesians, "Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ" (Ephesians 3:4). It's past time that all of us get to studying the Word of God to see what each of us must do to please God and quit blaming God for the confusion that exists in the religious world.

- Johnnie Edwards, via Guardian of Truth, 03/15/1990

Can Faith Save Him?

James, the half-brother of the Lord, asked this question in his great New Testament epistle. "What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?" (James 2:14)

Many today teach and believe that the mere expression of faith saves. But James says otherwise in this inspired text of Scripture (James 2:14-26). He says that "faith by itself, if it does not have works is dead" (v. 17).

Some tells us that if a sinner will only believe (accept Jesus as his personal Savior) he can be saved. In contrast to this James wrote: "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?" (vv. 19-20). Are the demons saved? No. But James says that "even the demons believe in one God and tremble!" So why aren't the demons saved if they truly believe? Demons do not have works that accompany their belief. They do not change. They continue to do contrary to God's will.

James provided two Old Testament examples of the kind of faith that pleases God.

(1) Abraham: his "faith was working together with his works" "when he offered Isaac his son on the altar" (vv. 21-22). All Bible students know of Abraham's great faith. But the reason his faith was so great was because it was an obedient faith (faith + works). No matter what instructions God gave him, he always obeyed (Hebrews 11:8, 17-19).

(2) Rahab: this woman of Jericho believed in the God of Israel (see Joshua 2:1-21). Her belief in God was demonstrated by her works in hiding the spies Joshua sent. "Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?" (James 2:25)

What were you taught about salvation? Was it "faith only"? Is it not ironic that the only time that Bible speaks of faith only, it says "NOT by faith only"? "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only" (James 2:24).

Jesus Himself did not say, "He who believes will be saved." Jesus taught: "He who believes AND is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16). I would strongly urge you to hear and heed the teachings of Jesus and James, and not men today who teach just the opposite!

- Jesse Flowers

Teach the Truth Without Compromise!

A dear friend and I were talking today about the expectation of very many among the younger generation with regard to preaching. With increasing fervor, some younger people are challenging older gospel preachers on the content of their gospel sermons. Preaching against sins with the same passion as John will bring accusations of being unkind, judgmental, intolerant and just plain mean to people who are guilty and sitting in the audience. He made the point, and rightly so, that the gospel was designed to be offensive. It is the nature of the gospel to cut the heart and cut into the quick (cf. Acts 2:37; 7:54). Those who receive the gospel start living by it as the people in Acts 2, "Brethren, what shall we do?" Those who do not receive the gospel stand ready to destroy the one who preached it to them, "When they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him".

As was the Lord's custom, He spoke in every synagogue that He possibly could (Matthew 4:23), even the one in His hometown of Nazareth. There the Lord announced that Isaiah's prophecy of the coming Messiah "has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:21). They listened to the Lord as he spoke, but soon became indignant. His claim to be the long-awaited Messiah was more than they could take. But on top of that, when they realized the application to themselves of Isaiah's prophecy, that they were the ones that were "poor," "captive," "blind," and "oppressed," they quickly became hostile and violent toward Jesus. Rather than believing and obeying the gospel, these listeners rejected God's messenger. This had the effect of forcing the Lord to leave and go other places where His saving message would be received.

Let us all take a moment to remember the words of our beloved brother Paul and resolve to help the younger generation to learn the significance of them: "For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ." (Galatians 1:10). Let us teach the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), without fear or favor! Why would the Lord Jesus and His specially chosen apostles upset people over their chosen unrighteous lifestyle if it made no difference what people believed or practiced (cf. Romans 1:18)? God's purpose is brought about when His word convicts people of their sins (cf. Titus 1:9; Jude 15; James 2:9). They must know what displeases God so that they can cease the practice of it. We all must "die to sin and live to righteousness" (1 Peter 2:24). We do no favors for people when we withhold from them any of the Lord's teaching regarding their words and deeds! (See 2 Corinthians 5:10.)

- Gary Smalley

[All Scriptures quoted are NASB, 1995 © The Lockman Foundation, unless otherwise noted.]

- * "Inactive religion, like still water, is first to freeze!"
 - * "Character is pretty much like window glass when it is cracked, it is cracked inside and out!"
 - * "A wise man will desire no more than he may get justly, use soberly, distribute cheerfully, and leave contentedly!"
 - * "If you blame others for your failures, do you credit others for your successes?"
 - * "No man ever regretted Christianity on his death bed!"
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What Must I Do To Be Saved?

HEAR THE GOSPEL

(Romans 10:14-17; John 20:30-31; Romans 1:15-17)

BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST

(Acts 8:37; John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6)

REPENT OF PAST SINS

(Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30)

CONFESS CHRIST

(Romans 10:9-10; Acts 8:37)

BE BAPTIZED

(Romans 6:3-4; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:36-39; 1 Peter 3:21)

LIVE A FAITHFUL LIFE

(Revelation 2:10; 2 Peter 1:5-11; John 15:1-8; Hebrews 10:23-25)