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The "One True Church"

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An expression that is anathema among Protestants today is "the one true church." In the universal or general sense they agree that there is only one true church, and that its members are known only to God who adds them to his family. In this sense they accept the Biblical teaching that "there is one body" (Ephesians 4:4). And to this we agree. But few, if any, believe there is "one true church" that is identifiable on earth.

Even many of our brethren have abandoned the idea of "restoring" the first-century church on earth. They scoff at the idea of studying the scriptures, identifying the church's nature and character, and establishing it in every city throughout the world. They have given up on "restoring" the ancient order of things and are speaking of "updating" the church to meet twentieth century needs.

To them, talk about getting back to the first-century church and its practices is arrogant and they often arrogantly respond: "which one"—Corinth and its factional, immoral character; Ephesus and its departure from love and its first works; or Thessalonica and its controversial views of the second coming? Their rationale is that churches at the beginning had problems and practiced error and God accepted them. By this they rationalize error today and plead for the acceptance of all churches. And, of course, that's where the premise of their plea leads.

The ultimate conclusion and foundation of their view is that no man can study the Bible and determine truth—therefore all men are doomed to accept error. What they ignore is that the teaching of what was later written in scripture was considered the standard of righteousness and these churches were all condemned and urged to correct these errors. And what they further ignore is that God not only condemned churches who practiced error, but He also threatened to remove the lampstand of any church that refused to repent (Revelation 2:5).

Jesus and the apostles again and again stressed the importance of truth: that the truth shall make man free; that one is sanctified by truth; that those who pervert truth will be accursed; that anyone who goes beyond truth is cut off from God; and that people who love not the truth and believe a lie will be condemned (John 8:31–32; 17:17; Galatians 1:6–9; 1 John 9; 2 Thessalonians 2:11–12). If Bible students cannot determine truth from error, then all are condemned to eternal damnation.

There is, for example, a way of worship that is in "spirit and truth" and there is a way of worship that is based on the doctrines of men and is vain (John 4:24 and Matthew 15:1–9). Since the word of God is truth and the scriptures are the basis of righteousness, one must as the Bereans search the scriptures daily to see what is true. Those that do will learn that brethren in the first century spoke to one another in hymns and spiritual songs, assembled on the first day of the week to observe the Lord's Supper, gave into a treasury as they were prospered, continued steadfastly in prayer, and taught and edified one another by the teaching of God's word (Ephesians 5:19; Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26; 14:1–40; 16:1–2). Is there anyone who would affirm that any of these practices are not based on truth?

We learned these practices from the Scripture, and we can learn also from scripture what the "work" of the church is, how churches were "organized," "how believers became members," what "name" they exalted and honored, and what "purity" and "holiness" demanded of them.

What God taught and approved of in these matters is what we are devoted to and if we practice them we will be identified with the practices of the “one true church” that Jesus built through the work and preaching of the apostles. This we are committed to and invite all men to join us in these practices. Pepper Road, Athens 5/522

Benjamin Franklin: Hope for Greater Disagreement

by Andy Sochor

Benjamin Franklin (1812-1878), one of the more influential preachers in the Restoration Movement, made it his aim to preach in such a way that his message was clearly understood. Notice the following quote from a sermon he delivered on the subject of foot-washing:

“All we ask of those who may differ with us, is to give us a patient and impartial hearing, and then, if we cannot agree, it is hoped the disagreement will be greater than it was before” (They Heard Him Gladly, p. 221).

Our world places a great deal of emphasis on *compromise*. If two parties disagree on a particular topic – religious, political, etc. – many believe that the ideal outcome would be for the two parties to meet somewhere in the middle.

In this statement, Franklin made it clear that he was not interested in compromise, he was interested in the truth. Because of this, he sought to deliver his message using “*great plainness of speech*” (2 Corinthians 3:12, KJV) so that his points were unmistakable.

Franklin also desired his listeners to patiently and impartially consider the message he delivered. As Jesus said, “*He who has ears to hear, let him hear*” (Luke 8:8), Franklin wanted people to do this in hopes that there would be some “*who [would hear] the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance*” (Luke 8:15).

However, not everyone will respond to the gospel in this way and Franklin knew it. Many will “*not endure sound doctrine,*” but instead want “*to have their ears tickled, [so] they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires*” (2 Timothy 4:3). Franklin was not going to change his message in order to accommodate these desires. Rather, he intended to do what Paul told Timothy to do – “*preach the word...in season and out of season*” (2 Timothy 4:2).

When there was a doctrinal matter in which there would potentially be disagreement, Franklin was not going to dance around the issue or use vague language that would be agreeable to both sides. Instead, his goal was to preach plainly, articulating the issue so clearly that the line between truth and error would be unmistakable. This would force people to either be convinced of the truth or, if they would not accept the truth, be clearly recognized to be in error.

In our preaching and teaching today, we must also use “*great plainness of speech*” (2 Corinthians 3:12, KJV) so that truth is easily distinguished from error. This allows others to make the decision to either accept or reject the truth. Paul wrote, “*For if the bugle produces an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle?*” (1 Corinthians 14:8). In the same way, if our teaching is indistinct and, therefore, indistinguishable from the message of those who are proclaiming “*a different gospel*” (cf. Galatians 1:6-9), who will abandon that error for the truth so they can be prepared for the judgment?

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