

Religious Division and Us

by Rodney Pitts

Being a Christian in the 21st century affords us some very special advantages never available before. We have an abundance of Bibles, bible aids, and even bible apps for computers, tablets, phones, etc., to benefit us in our study and evangelism. We have instant communication with others throughout the world by internet, radio, TV, cell phones, etc. And, we have the blessing of being able to look back and see the history of God's people and the results of their decisions and actions to help us make wiser choices in relationship to our service to God.

It would seem, therefore, that those who claim to follow the Lord today should be spiritually stronger, more united, and better able to deal with the spiritual issues facing us than ever before. And, not surprisingly, we generally think that we are. For, haven't you ever felt while studying the history of God's people that you would not have killed the prophets, followed after idolatrous gods, or called for the crucifixion of the Christ? And, these sentiments do not stop with our view of the Jews. For, are we not often tempted to look at the church at Corinthian, for example, and wonder how they could be so carnal and divided? Yet, we seem to forget that the spiritual leaders of the Jews and even the Corinthian brethren believed themselves to be far more spiritually mature than they actually were (see Matthew 23:30; 1 Corinthians 4:8-10).

I am led, therefore, to wonder if things have really changed all that much, despite all the advantages we have today. For, are we not still plagued by division as were those at Corinth? And, for the most part, do not most people who claim to follow Christ not only accept division in the body of Christ in the form of denominationalism with its differing doctrines and practices, but also believe it to be a good thing in that it offers "variety" for those who want to serve Christ in a way that is comfortable for them?

No matter what we want to think or feel about the present condition of the religious world, we must not ignore the fact that Paul exhorted the Corinthians brethren saying, "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you, but *that* you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10). This is what God desires. So, although it is far easier to ignore or discount the seriousness of religious division than it is to seek out real biblical unity by testing our faith through a thorough study of God's word with those of whom we are divided, this approach does nothing but perpetuate the problem. And that, my friends, delights the Devil!

Jesus, while on this earth, also made it clear that He desires all who follow Him to be united in doctrine and practice. For, in John 17:17-21 Jesus prayed that all who would believe on Him through the gospel would be united in the same fashion as He is united with the Father! This unity, as stated above, must involve oneness of doctrine (John 12:49) and practice (John 5:19), not to mention that of love and purpose. Christ also states that this unity is necessary in order for the world to believe that Christ was sent from the Father (John 17:21). With this before us, how can we possibly achieve this unity except through honest investigation of God's word, especially with those with whom we disagree and are divided? We do not have the privilege of asking inspired men for answers to questions we have today, but must "study to show ourselves approved unto God" (2 Timothy 2:15). When we couple this with God's command to "...sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear," is it quite difficult to believe that we have no, or little, obligation to study with those we believe to be lost or in error on certain points revealed within God's word.

James reminds us that "...if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins" (James 5:19-20). If we say we love the souls of others, does this not compel us to seek them out and try to convince them of the truth of God revealed by Christ in the New Testament? If not, then what do the above passages demand? Brethren and friends, it is time to begin listening to God. If

you believe God and love the souls of others, then God calls upon you to get busy? As John once wrote, “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18). Will you show this love by putting your faith in the line through the sharing the gospel truth to the world (Matthew 28:18-20). ■