



Biblical Christianity — No room for man-made alternatives!

...what concord hath Christ with Belial?...And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? (II Corinthians 6:15-16)

The prevailing climate in the professing Church of Christ today is one of accommodating everyone and their various beliefs. Important differences are set aside in order that unity of sorts may be had. Many go along with this idea because it is popular, easy and may at first seem advantageous. It may be argued that by being a little less strict on doctrinal positions and a little more tolerant of diverse opinions, the church will be more popular and so more people will come under its influence. The end therefore will justify the means. Such reasoning may be popular and pleasing to many, but IS IT RIGHT?

We must turn to the Word of God for a view on this subject of the acceptance of other faiths and religious alternatives. The Acts of the Apostles gives the historical account of the growth of the New Testament Church and sets before us a very clear pattern of the Church that God blesses. The marks of the Church in the Acts are marks that we should strive for today. We ask the question then, Did the early Church show such ecumenical tolerance when faced with alternative ways to worship God? The answer is clearly, NO!

In Acts 17:16-34 there is a record given of Paul's visit to Athens. Here Paul is faced with a city wholly given to idolatry v16. In a city that abounds with alternatives to Christianity, Paul is found preaching the Gospel of Christ and in doing so he clearly indicates that he does not recognize these as viable alternatives to be accommodated within the Christian Church.

The New Testament Church cannot accommodate man-made religion.

Man's version of true religion comes in many different forms. Its adherents may take on the guise of philosophers verse 18. There are an infinite number of philosophies that are accepted as alternatives to the Gospel of Christ today. The theories of mystics and humanist thinkers are welcomed in many churches despite the fact that Paul in Colossians 2:8 warns of the ruinous effect of bringing such philosophy into the Church -Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world; and not after Christ.

Man-made religion may also be seen in idolatry verse 16. Idolatry may be simply defined as putting something in the place of God. At its worst, idolatry will be outright paganism yet it is not always so. The person who puts pleasure, sport, comfort, or anything else for that matter, before God commits idolatry.



Penticton Free Presbyterian Church—Online article archive

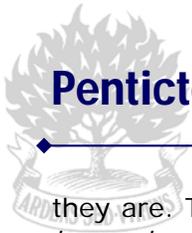
It is clear that there is a multiplicity of idols in Athens v16 Paul saw the city wholly given to idolatry -literally, "full of idols". They were so keen to include every possible deity that they built an altar to the unknown god (v 23). Men are never short of an alternative to God's way of salvation and worship. Not one of these proposed alternative ways to God was acceptable to Paul.

The first reason why the New Testament Church cannot accommodate any of these many forms of worship stems from its principal tenet. Paul in his discourse in the chapter makes it clear what the basic beliefs of New Testament Christianity are — a Saviour, Jesus, Who having died in the place of sinners rose again verse 18, and Who will return to judge the earth verse 30-31. Every man-made religion at its heart departs from this truth and proposes an alternative way to God other than through Christ alone. The Person and work of Christ are essential to salvation. He alone is the way to God — Jesus saith, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me (John 14:6). Because of such a fundamental difference there can be no agreement between Biblical Christianity and man-made religion.

The New Testament Church cannot tolerate man-made religion because Biblical Christianity is Divine in origin. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is not the product of the Apostles or of any other men — *But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.* (Galatians 1:11-12). There is no common ground between what God reveals and the product of the mind of man. *My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD* (Isaiah 55:8). It is clearly impossible to bring them together!

Man-made religion was intolerable to the early Church because they recognized its true origin. Paul says that his hearers were superstitious (v22). The word quite literally means "very reverent to demons". Let it be very clearly recognized by every Christian that the Devil is the source of all religion that is contrary to Biblical Christianity. When men worship something other than Christ alone they worship the Devil. Remember that *Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light* (II Cor 11:14) and it is possible to be deluded into following something which appears to be of God but is not. In his unsaved state every sinner is under the control of Satan — *the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God should shine unto them* (II Cor 4:4). The devil is here referred to as the god of this world which surely indicates that in some sense sinners worship him. The majority of men may not be what we think of today as devil-worshippers, yet by rejecting Christ as his Saviour the sinner gives the devil the place that Christ should have.

The accommodation of man-made religion breaks communion with God. Paul makes this clear when he rebukes the believers in Corinth for their tolerance of idolatry. He writes, *Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord; and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils* (1 Cor 10:21). They had embraced a philosophy that is current today, that a Christian is free to engage in the activities of the world and should tolerate alternate forms of worship. In doing so they were sitting at the devil's table! Such Christians are not enjoying communion with the Lord however much they may think that



Penticton Free Presbyterian Church—Online article archive

they are. To accommodate the devil's religion is to exclude the Lord for *no man can serve to masters* (Matt 7:24).

The tolerance of false religion by many in the professing church will be a feature of the last days — *Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils* (1 Tim 4:1). In the end time those who will be part of the visible Church will abandon the Gospel and follow devil inspired teaching. We may suppose that they will be deceived by doctrines that closely resemble the truth but are a lie. Every man-made alternative to the gospel is of the devil and it is sad that even Christians can be carried away in such error.

There is no room in the Christian Church for anything other than Biblical Christianity yet today the term "Christian" is applied to man-made religions! The Roman Catholic Church is openly referred to as a Christian Church even by fundamentalists. Yet it can be no such thing proposing as it does that sinners may obtain salvation and worship God on the basis of their own works and not through faith in Christ alone. The welcoming of devil and his alternatives into the Church by the ecumenical movement is clearly a departure from the principles of the Church in the Acts!

The Church must proclaim its intolerance of man-made religion.

Paul takes a very public stand to indicate that the gospel that he believes has no room for a tolerance of man-made alternatives. Many believers today may agree with Paul but will not take a public stand! Conviction of the truth will always produce a stand for the truth.

It is very important to note the method that Paul adopts to show his intolerance of false religion and error. Does he take the sword and execute? does he act as a demagogue and whip up racial and religious hatred? NO! He simply preaches the truth of the gospel in a forthright manner. This is how the Church shows her intolerance of error. When there is a lack of such preaching it is obvious that an accommodation has been reached with error. Any Church that sets aside the teaching of one way to God through faith in Christ alone has swallowed Satan's lie that there are viable, man-made alternatives by which men can find peace with God.

Paul begins to present the Gospel in verse 17. He begins with those who profess to seek God but are in error -Jews; then, devout idolators/worshippers; then with those whom he met in the market who may have had no god but commerce. He meets and speaks with philosophers (v 18), intellectual humanists who glory in their own wisdom; he goes to the highest court in Athens and speaks to them. No class of person is left out. Whatever their theories or beliefs there is only one message for them all — the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel message of salvation through Christ alone is intolerant. The remarkable thing about the intolerance of the gospel is that it is motivated by kindness. It is the love of all men's souls that moves Paul to speak, verse 16. He is stimulated to preach by the sight of their gross ignorance of God. His preaching is marked by grace, simplicity and gentleness. None was more intolerant of en-or and false religion than Christ Himself. He denounced the scribes and Pharisees as *children of the devil* (John 8:44), He took the scourge and drove marketers from the temple (John 2:15) yet there was none more gracious and kind than



Penticton Free Presbyterian Church—Online article archive

He Who went about doing good and saving every sinner who would come to God through Him alone. The commission of the Church is to act for the eternal well-being of men, to do as God commissioned Paul, to turn them...from the power of Satan unto God that they may receive forgiveness of sins (Acts 26: 18).

The reaction of men to such intolerant preaching will not be favourable.

Paul is dismissed as a babbler verse 18. In the eyes of the wise of this world the gospel is a foolish thing to be mocked and dismissed, verse 32. To those content in man-made religion the truth of Christ is a folly to be rejected. It is never easy to stand alone and oppose everything that is not of God. Today if we will conform to the New Testament pattern of intolerance of anything that sets Christ aside we will find ourselves in Paul's position -alone against the majority, denounced as narrow minded, and preaching a message that men naturally despise. There is no record of a Church formed in Athens, no record of a great move of God and multitudes seeking Christ. Numerical size does not always indicate the blessing of God. Clearly in Athens the majority was on the devil's side yet the blessing of God was with Paul. How much better it is to be in the despised minority and enjoy the favour of the Lord! Better to take a stand for truth and at the end hear *Well done, good and faithful servant* (Matthew 25:23) than to be popular and hear *I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity* (Matthew 7:23). One thing is sure, God will bless the faithful preaching of Christ as the only Saviour, verse 34. Some were converted from their sin to Christ, from idolatry to the true God, from man-made religion to the Divinely revealed truth.