

Naming Groups In Sin

May we publicly identify groups of people as being in error? For instance, may we say that Baptists believe in the church-degrading doctrine of premillennialism? Or, is it wrong to lump a group of people together and tag them with the onus of error? Let the Bible be our guide.

The New Testament of Jesus Christ reveals many instances when groups of people are identified with error and sin.

Pharisees, Matthew 5:20; 9:34; 12:14, 24; 22:15

Sadducees, Matthew 3:7; 16:1; 22:23

Scribes, Matthew 23:13-36

Lawyers, Luke 11:45-52

Cretans, Titus 1:12

Jews, 1 Corinthians 1:22-23; 2 Corinthians 11:24

Gentiles, Galatians 2:15; 1 Corinthians 10:20; Ephesians 4:17

The Rich, James 2:5-6

Each of the groups mentioned in the list above were identified with sin. Yet, we do not believe every person in a group was personally involved in every sin and error stated. The religious leaders of the Jews were constantly condemned by the Lord, but we know there were exceptions. Nicodemus was a leader, but not a partaker of many, if any, of the sins which are mentioned (cf. John 3:1-4; 19:39-42). Gamaliel, though a Pharisee, seems to have been more moderate than his companions (Acts 5:33-39). We do not suppose that all rich people were oppressing the brethren, nor that every single Cretan was an "evil beast" (James 2:5-6; Titus 1:12; cf. Acts 2:5, 11). Not all Jews and Gentiles were rebellious toward God, but that was the overall attitude of those groups of men.

Not every Baptist believes in faith only or premillennialism, however the overwhelming majority of them do. Not every person who holds membership in a local church of Christ believes in the virgin birth or a literal, eternal hell, but the majority do.

We wonder, if it is wrong to mention a group of people (Baptist) with a particular error (faith only, cf. James 2:14-26), is it wrong to mention a group of people (Christians) with truth (a cappella music, Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16)? If it is wrong to make a sweeping statement indicting a group with sin, why would it not also be wrong to praise a group for righteousness? Not every Christian is worthy of praise. Paul said some

were "enemies of the cross of Christ" (Philippians 3:18-19). So, can we say that brethren are devout and sincere?

If a person identifies with a group which upholds and spreads error, then that person has no right to complain when the group is mentioned in connection with that error--or if he is seen as a part of that group. If he objects to being grouped with them, then he should leave them. This is no less than God commands (2 Corinthians 6:11-18).

John the Baptist (Matthew 3:7), Paul (Ephesians 4:17), Peter (1 Peter 4:3), John (John 7:32), James (James 2:5-6) and Jesus Christ (Mark 8:15) all mentioned groups of men and tagged them with sin and error. Shall we not do the same?

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