

Where Is The Church Going?

Introduction. Postmodernism regards the Bible as an inspiring, human product that has no more authority or belief than other inspiring books. Postmodernists believe that religious truth is something men manufacture, not something God revealed. The goal is the deconstruction of any absolute doctrine or moral law, so that each person is free to reinvent his own.

Postmodernism has had a devastating impact on our society but it has had an even greater impact on our congregations. What we will look at in this lesson will disturb you, but in every one of the instances that we will study, compromise has arisen because distinctive preaching has gone by the wayside, allowing a younger generation to drift away from true Bible principles.

I. *Is Immersion A Condition Of Salvation?*

- A. Sadly, the day has now come when some are adopting the erroneous views of those who were met and defeated in debate years ago. The Fourth Avenue Church of Christ in Franklin, Tennessee announced that it would accept, and has accepted, as members those who have been "baptized" as infants, those who have been baptized for some other reason other than for the remission of sins, as well as those who have not been baptized by "any method." Gary Holloway, from Lipscomb University, said, "Currently there is some controversy among churches of Christ regarding immersion. Many of us cannot deny that there are many devout Christians who are unimmersed."
- B. Scripturally speaking, there are not different ways for Bible baptism to be administered. In Romans 6:4-5 and Colossians 2:12, Paul makes it plain that baptism is an immersion or burial. Furthermore, Acts 8:35-39 provides a crystal-clear example of the action of Bible baptism.
- C. The purpose and design of baptism is also clearly addressed in the New Testament.
 1. Baptism stands between the sinner and remission of sins (Acts 2:38).
 2. Baptism stands between the sinner and having sins washed away (Acts 22:16).
 3. Baptism stands between the sinner and the benefits of Christ's death (Romans 6:3).
 4. Baptism stands between the sinner and new life in Christ (Romans 6:4).
 5. Baptism stands between the sinner and being able to wear the name of Christ (1 Corinthians 1:13).

6. Baptism stands between the sinner and being in Christ's body (1 Corinthians 12:13).
7. Baptism stands between the sinner and being in Christ (Galatians 3:27).
8. Baptism stands between the sinner and the benefits of spiritual circumcision (Colossians 2:11-12).
9. Baptism stands between the sinner and salvation (1 Peter 3:21).

II. ***Are There Limitations On The Role Of Women?***

- A. Many congregations in a number of places have made it clear that they welcome women into worship and leadership positions. The elders of the Skillman Church of Christ in Dallas, Texas stated, "The majority of us believe the Bible does not inherently forbid women using their God-given talents ... within and without the worship assembly." An "Area of Service" form for men and women listed the following activities in which women could be involved: Usher, Serve Communion, Communion Meditation, Pray Publicly, Read Scripture Publicly, Sing with Worship Team, Sing Solo, Make Announcements, Deaconess, and Teach Adult Classes. Members were given three options to check off for each of the above: (1) I Am Willing To Serve; (2) I Support Women Serving; and, (3) While I Don't Support, I Will Accept Women Serving. There was no option for members to indicate an unwillingness to accept women in these roles.
- B. A major scripture to consider in the subject of the role of women is 1 Timothy 2:11-12. "Subjection" means "to line up under." Women demonstrate subjection by not usurping authority over the man. A bossy, overpowering spirit violates the command of learning in "silence" or "quietness" (1 Peter 3:3-4). "Silence" simply refers to the attitude of heart, not the physical act of speaking (cf. 2 Thessalonians 3:12). This is true not because women are inferior to men; while on earth, Jesus assumed a subordinate role, yet He was not inferior (1 Corinthians 11:3).
- C. In 1 Timothy 3:1-7, women cannot serve as elders. In 1 Timothy 3:8-12, women cannot serve as deacons, and in 1 Timothy 2:11-12, women cannot serve as preachers. However, the church of God needs all of its godly men and women. There are a multitude of tasks Christian women can do within the framework of what is authorized by scripture.

III. ***Does Music Matter?***

- A. Most Christians who lived through the last half of the 20th century believed the question on music in the worship of the church had been settled. However, Mark Henderson, of the Quail Springs Church of

Christ in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, said, "Our typical band is going to look like a drum set, a keyboard, and usually two or three guitars." The Preston Road Church of Christ in Dallas, Texas is advertising for a "worship minister" on their website. The requirements include a college degree, a "well-developed personal theology of worship," and "ability to play either keyboard or guitar." He further must be "capable to lead worship both a cappella and instrumentally."

- B. There are a number of reasons why faithful churches of Christ only sing.
 1. The New Testament teaches us to sing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). It does not teach us to play a mechanical instrument.
 2. The New Testament contains generic and specific instructions. If God said, "make music" (generic), any kind of music would do. However, God said, "sing" (specific), and that is a specific kind of music.
 3. We walk by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7) that comes by hearing God's word (Romans 10:17). Singing is by faith, and instruments are not.
 4. We are to worship "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). God's word is truth (John 17:17), and the truth teaches us to sing.
- C. Church historians agree that the practice of the first century church was to sing without instrumental accompaniment. The so-called "Church Fathers," from the second to the fifth centuries, wrote about singing in worship and spoke against instrumental music. Even during the Reformation Movement, from the 14th to the 16th centuries, leaders spoke out against the use of instruments, practiced by the Roman Catholic Church, as unscriptural. Although this is not positive, divine authority, it does show that instrumental music was understood to be wrong, and that its introduction came well after the New Testament was written.
- D. Those who desire to introduce mechanical instruments of music into the worship of the church are following human wisdom and cannot find one word in the New Testament that justifies their innovation.

IV. *How Should We View Denominations?*

- A. Through most of the history of churches of Christ in America it would have been rare for any to participate with any denomination in anything that implied approval or endorsement. Instead, teaching in classes and pulpits was bold to denounce the errors of denominations. But that is now sadly changing. An announcement at the Skillman Church of Christ read, "What fun! It was a joint meeting of Skillman Church of Christ and Wilshire Baptist Church for an evening of food, fellowship, and worship in north Dallas."

- B. People who are uninformed may think of the church of Christ as just another denomination, but a denomination is not what Jesus built (Matthew 16:18). A church that follows the faith and practice of the scriptures is undenominational. Fidelity to the truth demands that denominationalism be opposed. As a system it presumes to tolerate division of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:4; John 17:20-21).
- C. Some argue that the way to overcome division is simply to overlook differences in order to broaden the parameters of fellowship. Though many will see this as charitable, the problem is that not one place in apostolic teaching can be cited as encouraging toleration of error for the sake of unity (Romans 16:17-18; Ephesians 5:11; 2 John 9-11).
- D. We should view denominations as organizations composed of decent, honorable, and sincere people. Generally, they hold many convictions that are morally and spiritually correct. But even the most admirable characteristics of people and organizations must not overshadow the need for commitment to truth in faith and practice (Matthew 15:9-13).

V. ***Where Do We Stand On Homosexuality?***

- A. Along with these other errors, many have strayed from the New Testament and started reconsidering homosexuality. In 2008, Lipscomb University, in their "Christian Scholars Conference," allowed Jared Cramer, a former student of Abilene Christian University and a graduate student of the Sewanee School of Theology to present a lecture entitled, "One New Humanity: Reconsidering Homosexuality in Light of the Ecclesiology of Ephesians." The abstract states, "Paul's letter to the Ephesians presents an ecclesiology founded on unity in Christ rooted in the fullness of God. Ephesians builds on the fundamental truth that in Christ, God has broken down the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles and is creating one new humanity in place of the two. After examining the ecclesiology of Ephesians, this paper engages in a case study on the place of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered (GLBT) Christians in the Episcopal Church. Perhaps a deeper understanding of Paul's message in Ephesians can lead to a renewed perspective on the issues facing Christians today."
- B. What possible justification could Lipscomb University have for arranging and/or supporting a program that embraces a defense of this ungodly sin? Incredibly, Cramer asserts that any discussion of homosexuality "is shallow until a person actually engages in an actual relationship with a person of a different sexual orientation."
- C. Homosexuality was condemned by example in Genesis 19:4-7, and it was condemned explicitly in Leviticus (18:22; 20:13). In the New Testament, homosexuality is referred to as "vile affections" and "against nature" (Romans 1:26). Those who practice it will not go to

heaven (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). It is a deep shame that these gross levels of corruption are found among people that a few short decades ago were considered brethren.

Conclusion. The news of John F. Kennedy Jr.'s tragic airplane crash and death in 1999 brought a sense of shock to the entire nation. The most likely explanation of the crash was pilot error caused by spatial disorientation or vertigo. Pilots can become disoriented because their inner ear tricks them into thinking they are level when in fact they are turning or diving. At night or in cloudy skies there are few visual landmarks to reorient the brain. Experts view the dark skies and the lack of landmarks as a deadly combination that may have sent Kennedy unknowingly into a descent from which he could not recover.

Unless someone keeps their eyes on the guiding instrument of the Bible, they will stray off course. So many congregations have taken their eyes off the scriptures, discarding the authority of Jesus for their own authority. Because of this, they are slowly leaving behind all of the distinctive characteristics of the Lord's church. We normally use the term "liberal" to denote a congregation that supports human institutions, the sponsoring church arrangement, and the social gospel. There is quickly coming a time where we will think those positions are mild compared to what is coming down the block. We must "fight the good fight" and stand for truth.