

Why Are New Concepts Developed?

Introduction. Over the past few decades churches of Christ have been exposed to many new views. People who want to change the church have been, and still are, at work. Some of these new views seem to come and go, while others stick and advance at an alarming pace.

Along with condemning the souls of those who believe and practice these views in eternity, they also “trouble” and “unsettle” the minds of brethren in this life (cp. Acts 15:24). Maybe just as important as examining the doctrines themselves is examining why so many Christians and churches embrace or defend such novel views. This lesson will look at five prominent reasons why new concepts are developed.

I. The Small Number Of Saints

- A. No matter how you look at it, churches of Christ in the world are not huge in number. And once divisions over issues are taken into consideration, we are even smaller. Of course, we all would like to physically have more people.
- B. Some apparently do not like being “few” in number and so they seek “open fellowship” with so-called “believers.” The fact is, following Christ means being distinct from the world and religious groups that do not follow the Bible.
- C. The results of apostasy can be easily seen at the beginning of the second century.
 1. Many errors were introduced that formed the foundation of the Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches. There is little doubt that from the period of the death of the last apostle to the present time there were true Christians and local churches somewhere in the midst of so many apostates.
 2. Christians cannot trace an unbroken chain back to Pentecost, but they do not need to. The same effective word preached then can be preached now (Luke 8:11). The true disciples of Christ were few in number and the Lord even knew this would be so (Matthew 7:13-14; cp. Genesis 6:16; 1 Peter 3:20). The number of people does not determine the soundness of the doctrine that is preached and practiced.

II. A Lack Of Enthusiasm

- A. Congregations that are dead or dying, or small and struggling often look for new ways to inspire growth. Brethren get discouraged after trying gospel meetings, Vacation Bible Schools, special series, personal work programs, etc., with little or no results.

- B. Some have come to the conclusion that their problems stem from the church's lack of emotion and enthusiasm.
 - 1. People everywhere are trying to find God in the spectacular and dramatic. The test of worship is not, "Is it true?", but, "Does it sweep me off my feet?" The proof of preaching is not, "Is it from the book?", but, "Does it leave me tearful or excited"? People "like" this novel approach and they "feel" that it is more exciting.
 - 2. This invokes emotionalism, not spirituality. In order to get a spiritual "lift" or "high" some engage in what is artificially contrived — with most of it manifesting itself in worship assemblies. The elements of worship are then evaluated on the basis of how they make us feel.
 - 3. We need to "take heed" because too much of what is seen among conservative brethren is entertainment-based rather than worship-oriented. The emphasis of true worship is pleasing God, not ourselves (Matthew 15:8-9).

III. Culturalism

- A. Diversity in every field and political correctness is the name of the game today. Everything in society is being pressured to conform. And society's norms or lack thereof fly right in the face of God's will. The pressure is always on the church of the living God to conform or surrender. Deep down, too many Christians do not like being different so it has been easy to acquiesce.
- B. However, the scriptures still say to be different (Romans 12:2). The Bible still presents a distinct pattern for our moral and religious lives (1 Thessalonians 4:1-7). It still communicates a distinct pattern for local churches of Christ (1 Corinthians 4:17; Hebrews 8:5). The "faith" and "salvation" is "common" to all — it is the same for each one equally (Acts 6:7; Jude 3). God's word has no room for "faiths" (plural) or for personal, subjective views.

IV. Copying The Denominations

- A. It is virtually guaranteed that every one of the "new views" engaged in by brethren have come from human denominations. The idea is that if it works for them we must try it no matter if any biblical authority exists for its practice (cp. 1 Samuel 8:5-6).
- B. Leading men of institutional churches such as Max Lucado and Rubel Shelly are weakening the faith of Christians who read their books.
 - 1. Max Lucado has the ability to draw you in with his novel-like books but he discusses being saved by grace (which to him excludes baptism as being essential to salvation). His invitation to salvation sounds just like Billy Graham's.

2. Rubel Shelly is on record as saying that he had to make some changes in his ministry and practice to keep his children. Of course, this means that what children need is not the "story that never grows old," but entertainment and excitement. Ironically, we insult our children tremendously when we assume that they will not be moved to devotion in Christ by the simple preaching of the gospel.
- C. However, it gets a bit worse.
1. Some Christians are taken with contemporary denominational "pastors" like Francis Chan, quoting his books on Facebook and recommending his ideas to other saints.
 2. Chan likes to poke fun at a whole litany of rules that people argue about that he says ought to be irrelevant. Instead, he says we should be "focusing on Jesus."
- D. This admiration of false teachers will ultimately weaken brethren's resolve to stand for truth. The Bible has become insufficient and ineffective to them unless it is presented by an energetic, youthful "pastor du jour " (2 Timothy 4:1-4).

V. Rejection Of The "Pattern Concept"

- A. Brethren know that from the time of the "Restoration Movement" in the 1700s and 1800s there have been a lot of issues arise that divide brethren.
1. Issues like the missionary society and introduction of instrumental music in the 1850s; Premillennialism in the 1930s; the centralized or the sponsoring church concept along with benevolent and educational institutions funded by the congregations in the 1950s; the grace-unity movement in the 1970s; marriage, divorce, and remarriage in the 1990s; and, the controversy over the days of creation and theistic evolution in the 2000s have constantly plagued brethren.
 2. Because of the various digressive issues, it has been thought that something must be wrong with the idea of unity based on a pattern. But that conclusion is false. However much we might hate division, the answer is not found in compromise.
 - a) What we see happening is no different than what Christians in the first century experienced. At that time, there were even inspired apostles and spiritual gifts to help them, and yet they were continually assaulted by problems.
 - b) There was a wide range of division, apostasy, false doctrine, immorality, laxness, and unbelief in that time. Even when Jesus walked the earth many "went back and walked with Him no more" (John 6:66).

3. There will always be issues of one kind or another (Acts 20:29-32; 1 Corinthians 1:10; 11:19). It will not always be easy to see the truth on every matter, but to throw our hands in the air and give up is not the right answer (cp. Proverbs 21:25; Jeremiah 10:23). No, the only way to have and to keep a good conscience and to comply with revealed truth is to keep praying, studying, and holding fast (Proverbs 23:23).
- B. Some do not believe in any distinct pattern for the collective church. However, God does indeed teach us by way of commands (Acts 10:48), examples (Philippians 4:9), and necessary inferences (Acts 8:35-36). God's true grace, freedom, and liberty are not found in our ways or works but in accepting and obeying both His work and His will for us (John 8:32; Ephesians 2:9-10; Philippians 2:12; Titus 3:5; Hebrews 5:8-9).

Conclusion. For a long time, there have been predictions that churches of Christ, at least those that are described as "conservative," will disappear within 50 years unless changes are made. This is said by those who want to make radical changes, and attempt to frighten us into accepting these changes by convincing us of the terrible consequences of the "status quo."

But this "status quo" is the gospel that has been revealed by God (2 Thessalonians 2:15; 3:6). As far as changing it goes, an unwavering stand has to be taken against the innovations of men (Romans 1:16; 2 Timothy 2:2; 2 John 9-10). It will not work for us to be quiet and leave it alone, hoping it will go away (cp. James 5:19-20; Galatians 6:1).

God gives us time to learn and grow (Acts 2:42; 2 Peter 3:18) but we cannot take it too far (Revelation 2:21). Our growth cannot be in the policies, philosophies, ideologies, and theologies of men who want to change the pattern of sound words. Paul warned that "evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived" (2 Timothy 3:13). We need to make sure that we are not of that number.

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