

Religious Division

by Bill Crews

Religious Division Today

As evidenced by such organizations as the **Ministerial Alliance** and the **World Council of Churches of Christ**, and such movements as the **Ecumenical Movement**, and such celebrations as **International Brotherhood Week**, the majority of those individuals who consider themselves Christians and those denominations that regard themselves as being of Christ **believe that religious division is inevitable, unpreventable, acceptable and even advantageous**. They even believe we must accept it, learn to live with it and make the most of it. Some even believe it is of God and thank Him for the many churches so that each can “join” the church of his choice.

The New Testament Picture

In the first century, according to what is depicted in the New Testament, Christians constituted one church and local congregations were identical in organization, doctrine and practice. Jesus the Christ had prayed that all who believe on Him through the word taught by the apostles might be one, even as He and the Father were one (John 17:20-21). He also declared that a kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation and that a house or city divided against itself shall not stand (Matthew 12:25). Paul enjoined the Corinthian brethren *“through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment”* (1 Corinthians 1:10). The same apostle taught that there is one God and Father, one Lord, one Spirit, one body (or one church; the body is the church — Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:23; Colossians 1:18), one faith, one baptism, and one hope (Ephesians 4:4-6). Those who were saying, *“I am of Paul”* or *“I am of Apollos”* were charged with carnality and immaturity (1 Corinthians 3:1-4). Division is everywhere condemned and unity enjoined.

We Cannot Endorse Division

We cannot, therefore, in defiance of God’s revelation, join in the chorus that endorses religious division. We know that it is neither of God nor acceptable to God. It is certainly not advantageous, but destructive. It tears down rather than builds up. It causes the world to disbelieve rather than to believe (John 17:21). It is inevitable and unpreventable only in the sense that sin is inevitable and Satan is allowed to have his way in the hearts and lives of men and women. As a Bible-believing people we cannot say with good conscience, “It doesn’t really matter what creed you subscribe to or what church you belong to, as long as you are sincere and honest in your faith and practice.” Or, “There are many ways to heaven, just as there are many roads that lead to the same city and rivers that flow into the same ocean.” Or, “God be thanked for the many churches that every man can belong to the church of his choice” Or, “Since there are good people in all churches and good in all churches, all churches are good.” Or, “Since we are all trying to serve the same God and reach the same heaven, we should work together in love and tolerance.” Or, “We are agreed on so many things, and all of our differences are insignificant.” These are not Biblical statements or principles. They are the statements and declarations of men.

Our Plea

If that last statement is true, then why were the various denominations — there are hundreds of them with sizable memberships — founded in the first place? (in their inceptions these differences were not regarded as insignificant) and why do they still continue? (if the differences are now regarded as insignificant). All do agree that the followers of Christ were called *“Christians”* in the New Testament, and all agree that *“churches of Christ”* is a scriptural designation. Most agree that the New Testament is an adequate guide. Then why maintain and uphold religious division? Why hold on to and demand allegiance to catechisms, manuals, disciplines, articles of faith and confessions of faith written by fallible men? The New Testament was written by men guided by the Holy Spirit, and it is inspired and infallible. Why insist upon being Catholics, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, Nazarenes, Pentecostals, etc. Our simple plea is that those who profess to be and desire to be followers of Christ give up human names, human doctrines and creeds, human organizations, and human practices and become simply Christians, members of the church of Christ, governed and guided by the New Testament of Christ.

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