

# Faith Pulpit

## Ecclesiastical Separation

Nearly four centuries ago the Puritan William Perkins drew a useful distinction. He suggested that there is a working difference between error and heresy. He wrote that error of itself is no ground for breaking fellowship, that any doctrinal discrepancy between two Christians means that one or both are in error. The Bible does not on that account command them to separate from each other. Heresy is another matter; heresy is error, but error that strikes at the very roots of the faith, and heresy is always grounds for breaking fellowship.

Scripture bears out this latter observation. Paul in 2 Cor. 6:14 commands us not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers, and he follows the command with five unthinkableables. John in his second epistle wrote, “For many deceivers are entered into this world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come (or ‘coming’) in the flesh” (2 John 7). Then in verses 10 and 11 he adds, “If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.”

Paul had already written, “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them” (Rom. 16:17).

The GARBC has a long record of Biblical separation, and coincidentally, just about the way that Perkins said it. From well back in the Baptist Bible Union years, we have regarded error with a fair degree of Christian forbearance, but we have resolutely separated from heresy.

### **Errors**

The errors that we have tolerated in others make quite a list. Even before the McIntire involvements, which lasted a quarter of a century, we had working fellowship with such amillennials as T.T. Shields. We have worked with pedobaptists—who were gentlemen enough not to sprinkle babies on our

platforms. We have had fellowship with some who held to covenant theology and with others best described as anti-dispensational. We have refused to divide over Bible translations. And wherever we find ourselves along the line between strong Arminianism and strong Calvinism, we have tried to treat one another with Christian grace; and even though somebody must be in error, we have refused to divide over that error.

### **More Serious Errors**

We have regarded other errors as more serious. For example, we have refused to yoke with those who speak in tongues, and for at least two reasons: first, because we regard tongues as divisive, and second, because we see the movement putting religious experience as a higher authority than Scripture. Similarly, we have refused to yoke with those Evangelicals who question or deny Biblical inerrancy. However orthodox their doctrinal system may otherwise appear, we look askance at any who presume to judge the Word of God; and the lesson from history is that they drift inevitably toward liberalism.

### **Heresy**

We have a long history of rejecting outright heresy. We protested Modernism, and we separated from it, because in denying the supernatural, it negated or compromised all the doctrines in New Testament Christianity. We refused to yoke with the Neo-Orthodox because their supernatural is not that of the Bible literally interpreted, and because their view strikes at the roots of the faith. We have refused to link with those who hold to sacramental grace, a system we find nowhere in the New Testament and which appears to deaden the conscience. We find no common ground with the New Age movement, nor with the other cults, whether Adventist, Eddysist, Masonic, Mormon, Unificationist, Unitarian, or Watchtower. All of these heresies reject the Bible literally interpreted; all of them declare that man is not as depraved as the Bible says, and all of them provide a cheaper redemption than Christ's on the cross.

We avoid the yokes of these people, not because we have any personal animosity toward them, but because the Bible commands us to have no partnership with them.

### **The Current Problem**

The great test of New Testament faith in this century has been a corollary problem. How are we to regard professing believers who maintain platform cooperation with unbelievers, meaning liberals? In the 1950s we read that cooperative evangelism, yoking with liberals, was a way to win those liberals to Christ. That was one way to justify disobedience. Now we find that such yokes are not to win the liberals, because liberalism is an alternate and legitimate form of faith.

But how are we to regard unseparated believers? On the one hand, we grieve over their disobedience, and I trust, we grieve without personal animosity. But when it comes to platform cooperation, we cannot yoke with them. Their yoke with heretics and their toleration of heresy convey something public: that the doctrines are not all that important anyway.

It compares with hearing a dull sermon. We ask ourselves, how can this man feel so casual about the doctrines he claims to hold? Does he feel so little importance in the blood that bought his salvation? Is redemption so ordinary to him? In the same vein, when the Calvary Baptist Church of Laodicea holds joint meetings with the liberals across town, must we not grieve that they have such a lax view of doctrines for which the Apostles died?

We feel and I think rightly, that the Biblical principles applies:

***Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, an not after the tradition which he received of us (2 Thes. 3:6).***

Almost accidentally we find ourselves agreeing with Perkins. We regret our own errors and show patience with the errors of others. Heresy, however, strikes at the roots, and we separate from it. When a man condones heresy and yokes himself with those who hold it, his error becomes serious indeed; and we cannot pass along the signal that he is putting out.

## **Dr. Robert Delnay**

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