

Why I Left Liberalism

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The Lord's church today is divided over many issues. Most of those issues are simply filed under the subject of Bible Authority. I spent my first preaching work teaching liberal doctrines relative to the church's authority to support things in which the Bible never authorized. I spent most of my second preaching work studying some of these issues because of Ed Phillips who was my neighbour, friend, and a fellow Gospel Preacher. I had studied with others and had seen some of my inconsistencies but I was not fully convinced that I was a false teacher on these matters of authority. I then began my third work and during the beginning of that work I was realizing more and more as I studied. I never did buy into the fact that we had authority to support orphan homes with the Lord's money, but I did not stand against it either. This article is going to reveal what finally made me leave the liberal position of Institutionalism and the things relating to that position. I knew of some like myself who did not belong in that belief system, but we also had a developed hatred towards what we termed "anti's". Of course labels are used to develop prejudice against a group of people. For example the Christian church calls faithful members of the Lord's church "non-instrumentalist". This is true, for faithful Bible students would be "anti instruments" or against instruments used in Christian worship. We must realize that there are extremists on all sides of every issue. I am not an extremist. I was listening to a lecture on the subject of "anti-ism" on the Internet. This fellow said that "anti-ism" was people who bind one communion cup, no bible class, etc. This is the case in some extreme positions, but not most. Do not allow your mind to be clouded by misrepresentations so that you will not study these issues. This is what I did, it took me too long to wake up and see the truth!

Before studying issues such as these there must be a proper understanding of Bible authority. When we read the Bible we must note that there are two divisions in it. There is the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament is also known as the Law of Moses. The Old Testament Law was given to the Nation of Israel (Deuteronomy 5:1ff.). Prior to the Law of Moses there was the Law of the Patriarchs. The Law of Moses was done away when Christ died on Calvary's Cross (Colossians 2:14, Romans 7:1-6, Ephesians 2:13-16, and Hebrews 9:15-17). The Law of Christ, or the New Testament then became the binding law and this law was to all men (Romans 1:16). The New Testament Law is the final and everlasting Law (Matthew 24:25 and I Peter 1:22-23). The New Testament was once delivered (Jude verse 3), and is not to be changed in any way (Galatians 1:8-12 and Revelation 22:18-19). The New Testament Law is best summed up here: (Hebrews 1:1-2) "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds." The Bible teaches us that we must do all things by the authority of Christ (Colossians 3:17). We can apply Bible Authority in three ways: 1. Direct Command; 2. Approved Example; 3. Necessary Inference. Let's use the Lord's Supper for an example of how we obtain all three ways of authority. We have the command to partake of the Lord's Supper (I Corinthians 11:23-26). We have an example of the Lord's Supper being taken on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). From the same example in Acts 20:7, we can infer that we are to partake of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week. Then of course we have that of expediencies. Expediencies are those things that help us to carry out commands. For example, we are to assemble together (Hebrews 10:25). It is expedient to have a place to assemble. Therefore, it would be authorised to have a building to meet in. An abuse of this would be the instrument used during the song worship. The New Testament teaches that the heart is to be the instrument used in singing to the Lord (Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16). If something else was used that would be an addition which would be a sin (Revelation 22:18-19). Some would argue that if God does not tell us that we cannot do something, His silence permits us to do this thing. For example some might say that God did not tell us that we can't use popcorn in the Lord's Supper. Yet, when the Lord instituted it he gave the bread and fruit of the vine as the components (Matthew 26:26-30). Again, we must realise that we cannot add to nor take from what He tells us (Deuteronomy 4:2 and Revelation 22:18-19). The same person that would argue this statement would turn around and expect their children to obey their

silence. For example when a parent tells their child to be home by 8:00 PM, the parent does not say "not 9:00, 10:00, 11:00, etc." That parent expects their child at 8:00 because that was the order given. God expects us to do what He has said, nothing more and nothing less. As we now have an understanding of establishing Bible Authority let us talk of some of the issues in which I had to change my views on. I pray that if you practice these things this material will help you to study them. I also share the words of the Apostle Paul: "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?" - Galatians 4:16. Our lesson also will deal with what is commanded, approved, or inferred for the church collectively to do and that which is to be done by Christians on an individual basis. In this article when the "Lord's Money" is spoken of we are talking about that which is collected from the saints on the first day of the week (I Corinthians 16:1-2).

THE ORPHAN HOME ISSUE

While I did not support many of my brethren and their stand that it was authorised to support orphan homes with the Lord's money, I did not stand against it either. I heard the arguments and the usage of James chapter one and the twenty-seventh verse. I did not feel that this verse authorised sending the Lord's money to orphan homes. I heard the frequent argument that "anti's" were heartless and that they were stingy with their money. I believed that argument. I looked at the word visit in James 1:27 and found that it meant to inspect. I wondered where my fellow brethren got "send money from the Lord's treasury" from a word that meant inspect. Looking further into this verse one must also look at the subject of the widows, and by studying that much is also revealed about supporting the orphan homes. I realised that the church is to care for widows. Yet, there are limitations and restrictions on how the church is to care for widows. (I Timothy 5:16) "If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed." Then after looking into the context of this verse it was impossible for me to say the James was saying something that contradicted what the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy. I realise there is a limitation on these things.

I have taught from every pulpit that I teach from that the way to find someone using a verse out of context is to back up 5 verses and go forward 5 verses to get an idea of the context of a verse. Let's do that with James 1:27. (James 1:22-27) "22. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. 23. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: 24. For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. 25. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. 26. If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. 27. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." Notice all the underlined terms that also are in bold print. How many times do you see the church mentioned collectively? James here, regardless of what is to be done, is speaking to the individual.

BENEVOLENCE

Benevolence is the subject that I had the hardest time with. I read debates, spoke with conservative brethren, and debated it with myself and also discussed it with my wife. I believed that the church was to help all people including the alien sinners with the Lord's money. I had read many "non-institutional" publications that taught that the work of the individual was to help the alien sinner and that the church was limited to Christians only. I could not see this from my study of the scriptures. I used logical arguments like: "If I die the church can help my wife who is a Christian, but not my children who are not". I fought it with those things. Just like a denominational person might argue against the truth by saying: "The Lord loves all and would not judge those who were not baptised". The scriptures clearly teach that baptism is commanded (Acts 2:38, John 3:3-5, Acts 22:16, Romans 6:3-5, and I Peter 3:20-21). Using emotional arguments does not change the truth. I realised this. Then of course the only way to prove that the church can help the alien

sinner is to do so with Bible (I Thessalonians 5:21). I sought out to do so. Yet, every time I found a passage where the Lord's money was used it was given to Christians such as in Romans 15:25-26.

I began the argument from what seemed to be two of the liberal positions strongest arguments. The first is found in II Corinthians 9:13 which reads: "Whiles by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men." This seemed to clear the subject in my mind. I stopped my search. Then one day I was doing a word study on fellowship as I was preparing a sermon on the subject. I found that the word "distribution" found in II Corinthians 9:13 was the same Greek word as the word translated as "communion" in II Corinthians 6:14. I asked myself the same question Paul asked the Corinthian brethren in II Corinthians 6:14: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" I did further research, not being a Greek scholar just using Strong's number 2842. I found that every time this Greek word appeared it had to do with joint participation between Christians and Christians or Christians and God. Not once does it appear Christians to non-Christians. For example this is where that word appears and what English word is used for it:

Act 2:42 fellowship [2842], Romans 15:26 contribution [2842], I Corinthians 1:9 fellowship [2842], I Corinthians 10:16 communion [2842], II Corinthians 6:14 communion, [2842] II Corinthians 8:4 fellowship [2842], II Corinthians 9:13 distribution [2842], II Corinthians 13:14 communion [2842], Galatians 2:9 fellowship [2842], Ephesians 3:9 fellowship [2842], Philippians 1:5 fellowship [2842], Philippians 2:1 fellowship [2842], Philippians 3:10 fellowship [2842], Philemon 1:6 communication [2842], Hebrews 13:16 communicate [2842], 1 John 1:3 (TWICE) fellowship [2842], fellowship [2842], 1 John 1:6 fellowship [2842], and 1 John 1:7 fellowship [2842].

I asked myself the next logical question. If in all these passages the only time non-Christians are referenced is a time in which Paul asked what Christians were doing in fellowship with non-Christians, why would he turn around and use the same word authorising the church to give to non-Christians? As a matter of fact God demands that we have NO fellowship with darkness (Ephesians 5:11). Another example of what this word study has done is that it let me see this "all men" argument in a new light. In Ephesians 3:9 the statement "all men" is mentioned. The passage reads "And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ." Now, if the Gospel is hid, it is hid from whom? That answer is found in II Corinthians 4:3, it is hid from the lost. How can those who have been blinded have fellowship in the mystery? Obviously Paul did not mean that in an unrestricted sense. Those that reject the Gospel, the lost, cannot share in the Gospel and the benefits of being in the church. Obviously not all times we see the statement "all men" includes every kind with no exclusions. A note should also be made that the word "men" in II Corinthians 9:13 has been added to the text which the King James makes us aware of by putting it in italics. Also, you can look to verse fourteen for further clarification. (II Corinthians 9:14) "And by their prayer for you...". Let me ask, is that the non-Christians praying for the Christians? I thought sin separates men from God (Isaiah 59:1-2), and that God does not hear the prayer of the alien sinner (I Peter 3:12). There is also contextual proof that Christians are the only ones supported here by the church. Read the whole context of chapters eight and nine. Notice the beginning passages of each chapter. (II Corinthians 8:1;4) "1. Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia. 4. Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints." (II Corinthians 9:1) "For as touching the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you." Why would Paul write two chapters about providing for the saints then, in one verse talk about non-Christians?

The only other passage that I could argue from stating that the church has authority to give to non-Christians from the Lord's money was in Galatians 6:10. Again, let us look at this

passage and determine if the passage means for Christians or the church to "do good unto all men". (Galatians 6:5-10) "5. For every man shall bear his own burden. 6. Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things. 7. Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. 8. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. 9. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. 10. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." Again, as we did in James 1:27, the underlined words should point out to the honest person to whom Galatians 6:10 applies which is the individual Christian. Paul is talking to the individuals telling them that which they sow they will reap. Giving them instructions for their works. This points to passages such as (II Corinthians 9:6). We will be judged on OUR works (II Corinthians 5:10). The argument then given in response to this is: "whatever the individual can do the church can do collectively". Some would say that the book of Galatians is written to the church and it is addressed to the church (Galatians 1:1-2). They then add to that statement the thought that this Epistle is for the church collectively and they are to do those things told to them collectively. Let me ask, was the church baptised into the church (Galatians 3:27)? Surely we can see that the individuals there were baptised into the church. Thus, this Epistle is addressed to the members of those congregations meeting in the area of Galatia. There will be those who will say: "Non-Institutional brethren are stingy with their money, they just do not want to spend it". Think about this for a moment, the Pro-Institutional position states it is the work of the church with the Lord's money. The Non-Institutional position says this support must come from your own pockets without taking what we give to God it is in addition to what we give to the Lord. I must now ask, who is stingy with their money?

CAN THE CHURCH DO EVERYTHING THE INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIAN CAN DO?

Part of the Liberal doctrine teaches that the church can do everything the individual can do. We must realise that the individual Christian as pointed out in Galatians 6:10 does have a role of benevolence to the non-Christian and is also pointed out in passages such as (Matthew 25:31ff.). Yet, the argument that "the individual Christian must do it and the church has authority to do anything the individual Christian must do" is not biblical. For example, in Matthew chapter 18 verses fifteen through seventeen we are told how two Christians can handle a problem between each other. The text reads: "15. Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. 16. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. 17. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." Notice that the church was not involved even when a plurality of brethren were involved. The church became involved when the issue was brought before them, not until then. You also have a difference of the work of the church and individuals shown in I Timothy 5:16.

CHURCHES BREAKING AUTONOMY

Another practice that helped open my eyes to the error of Institutionalism was churches breaking autonomy. You have elders of congregations overseeing the work and funds of others. This is nothing more or less than Catholicism. Elders only have authority to oversee the flock among them (I Peter 5:1-2). There is no authority for this practice.

Then you have the formation of missionary societies. Congregations get involved in works that are too large for them and they need to draw funds from others. When we look to the New Testament pattern the only time we find Christians getting help is in time of need. Not in time of starting a work too big for the local congregation to handle.

THE SOCIAL GOSPEL

When I was a teenager I loved "Vacation Bible School". We had cookies, a puppet show, and yes also a bible class. I never thought about what we were doing. The way it was set up is that on Friday night the children would perform a little show after the puppets taught their little thought for the night. What was our goal for VBS? It was to get to the parents by letting the children have a good time. We even admitted that to be the case. We even had a Friday night graduation show followed by a cookout that drew in the parents. I look back and I am sorry that I was not wise enough to see that error. We would never allow the children to perform songs in front of us at any other service, and this was the assembled service of the saints. We would have called that a choir anywhere else. We would never allow a puppet show on Wednesday nights or any other time. Then we used a cookout to draw the parents. Of course this practice was not mentioned in the Bible. The only method of evangelism employed in the first century was preaching the truth (Matthew 28:19, Acts 5:42, Acts 8:4, and Romans 1:16).

CONCLUSION

This article did not give every argument against institutionalism. It did give why I left my former positions. The Bible teaches us that if we do not teach the truth we do not have God and that faithful Christians should not fellowship us. (II John 9-11) "9. Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. 10. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: 11. For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." I have and will continue to repent of the error of my past practices. We must strive always to speak as the oracles of God (I Peter 4:11). We must not employ tactics to grow that are beyond or short of the New Testaments teaching. The only way to come out of error is to realise what it is. Studying the Bible, as did the Bereans (Acts 17:10-11), is what brought me away from Liberalism. Dear reader, study your Bible and if there is a need of repentance on your part please do so before it is too late (Luke 13:3-5).

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