

Answering the Ecumenical Movement

Ephesians 4:3

Introduction:

- A. **Ecumenical** (Webster): “Pertaining to the whole Christian Church”
 - 1. This definition is inclusive of all churches who claim to be Christian, e.g.. Denominations, and thus unscriptural
 - 2. The church of the New Testament is nondenominational (Mat. 16:18; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4)
- B. **Ecumenical** (Baker’s Dictionary of Theology, 1982. “Ecumenicism,” by John H. Gerstner, pp. 176-177):
 - 1. Basic original meaning was geographical
 - 2. Later included cultural significance
 - 3. Division (result of the Protestant Reformation) brought about redefinition: Unity and Universality
 - 4. Has historically conflicting doctrine “gingerly and unrealistically”
 - 5. Leadership in movement has often been in the hands of those who have been less concerned theologically
- C. Four critical tenets of ecumenicism (The Spiritual Sword, 1988. “Has Ecumenicism Invaded the Church,” by Thomas B. Warren):
 - 1. Truth is subjective and relative; not absolute
 - 2. No one can really learn or know the truth
 - 3. That which is not explicitly disapproved is authorized
 - 4. Authority, or authorization from God, is not necessary to that which man may practice in religion
- D. If we believe what ecumenicism currently teaches:
 - 1. We cannot know if there is a God
 - 2. We cannot know His will for us
 - 3. We cannot know anything definitively about religion or worship
 - 4. We cannot know if there is life after death, or if there will be a resurrection, and that makes us of all men most miserable (1 Cor. 15:1-19)

I. Truth is objective and absolute

- A. **Objective**: “Free from personal feelings, opinions, prejudice, etc., unbiased. Pertaining to what is external to or independent of the mind; real: Opposed to subjective.”
 - 1. Truth remains truth regardless of what one may think about it: If truth is not objective then there can be no truth (Romans 3:1-4)
 - 2. One may think that he can flap his arms and fly, but that does not change the truth of the law of gravity: One may think what one will about God, but that does not change the truth about God or the truth of God.
- B. **Absolute**: “Complete; perfect. Unadulterated; pure. Not relative to anything else; independent.”
 - 1. Scripture came independently of man’s opinion, feeling, prejudice, bias, etc. (2 Pet. 1:19-21)

2. See also 1 Cor. 2:9-10, 13; Gal. 1:12

II. Truth may be learned and known

- A. Mat. 11:28-30 -- If cannot learn, Jesus gave an impossible command, "Learn of me."
- B. Jn. 8:31-32 -- If cannot know the truth then Jesus lied
- C. There are many things which can be known from the Bible:
 - 1. Know and trust God as a result of that knowledge (Psm. 9:10; 100:3)
 - 2. God desires we know truth and know wisdom (Psm. 51:6)
 - 3. Know the way wherein we should walk (Psm. 143:8)
 - 4. Know wisdom, instruction and perceive words of understanding (Prov. 1:2)
 - 5. Know God's ways (Isa. 58:2)
 - 6. Know a true from a false prophet (Ezk. 2:1-5; 1 Jn. 4:1-6)
 - 7. Know what and how to worship (Jn. 4:22-24)
 - 8. Know the truth (Jn. 8:32)
 - 9. Know the example and teaching of Jesus (Jn. 13:17)
 - 10. Know the love of Christ (Eph. 3:19)
 - 11. Know whom to believe (2 Tim. 1:12)
 - 12. Know that we know Him (1 Jn. 2:3)
 - 13. Know we are in Him (1 Jn. 2:5)
 - 14. Know we have passed from death to life (1 Jn. 3:14)
 - 15. Know we are of the truth (1 Jn. 3:19)
 - 16. Know He abides in us (1 Jn. 3:24)
 - 17. Know we are of God (1 Jn. 5:19)
- D. In the time when most members of the Lord's church believed we could know the truth (not in a puffed up way) we were decidedly evangelistic. What is different today?
 - 1. Cannot win people with the truth because do not believe we can know it
 - 2. Some turn into a numbers obsessed social organization and enlarge their doctrine to take in those whom the truth once kept out until they accepted Christ's conditions for salvation

III. God does not have to explicitly disapprove a thing for it to be determined as unauthorized

- A. Re: Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1-2), if they needed no authority then two innocent men were unjustly punished
- B. Whatsoever is not of faith is sin (Rom. 14:23), and faith comes by hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17), therefore to do that which is not authorized by the word of God is sin and cannot be of faith!

IV. Authority from God is necessary for that which may be practiced in religion

- A. Must do all by the authority of Christ (Col. 3:17)
- B. Must keep His commandments (Jn. 14:15)
- C. Must obey Him (Heb. 5:8-9)
- D. Must abide in the doctrine of Christ (2 Jn. 9-11)

- V. The superior, scriptural way to unity is by, through and upon God's word**
- A. Disciples are to be "one," but can be so only through the Spirit inspired, apostolically proclaimed word of God (Jn. 17:14-21)
 - B. Read Col. 3:17; 1 Cor. 1:10-13--Scriptural unity can only be achieved by:
 1. A determination to act only by the authority of Christ
 2. Being satisfied with nothing short of speaking the same thing
 3. Determining, as a forethought rather than an afterthought, to be unified
 4. Being satisfied with nothing less than being perfectly joined together in the same mind (cf. Phil. 2:5ff), and in the same judgment which can only be achieved when God's will rather than one's own will is sought

Conclusion:

- A. The ecumenical movement, regardless of how well intentioned:
 1. Is a compromise movement designed by man to accommodate man's perceived modern needs
 2. Is not now, nor has ever been, as concerned with truth and righteousness as it has been with achieving unity in doctrinal diversity
- B. God's truth is perfect, complete, objective and absolute, remaining unaffected by human opinion and intransigence
 1. God's word is truth (Jn. 17:17), and He cannot lie (Tit. 1:2)
 2. God's truth is the only thing that can make us free from sin to enjoy salvation (Jn. 8:32)
 3. God's truth is the only thing upon which religious unity can truly exist and be preserved
- C. The Bible must be studied for all that can be learned from it (2 Tim. 3:14-17)
- D. The word of God must be handled properly (2 Tim. 2:15)
 1. Properly will save (1 Tim. 4:16)
 2. Improperly will not save (2 Pet. 3:16)
- E. There will always be those who do not love the truth and who will ransom it for low human reasons (2 Thes. 2:11-12)
- F. The ecumenical movement is determined to undo and deny all that Christ accomplished in His life, death, burial and resurrection, that is the reconciliation of man to God, and replace it with a movement to reconcile man unto man
 1. The ecumenical movement within churches of Christ is determined to undo and erase all of the great accomplishments of the effort to restore pristine New Testament Christianity
 2. This is seen in the denigration of brethren of old who "stood in the breach," and to whom we all owe a debt of gratitude
- G. Where has the ecumenical movement brought contemporary Bible scholarship? A statement attributed to Mark Twain puts it well: "The researches of many commentators have already thrown much darkness upon the subject, and it is possible that, if they shall continue, we shall know nothing about it at all."

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