



The West End Encourager

March 19, 2017

Following the Bible

Our claim to a unique position in the religious world is our determination to follow the Bible. But when this claim is made, the usual response is "All churches follow the Bible." This raises an obvious question: "If all churches follow the Bible, why the variety of doctrines and practices?"

Unacceptable Explanations

Some say the Bible cannot be understood sufficiently well to allow for unity. This questions God's wisdom, for God intended for us to understand. "Be ye not foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:17). Was God incapable of providing a book that men could understand?

Others insist that the Bible actually teaches many different things. Denominationalists have been claiming this for years. More recently, we even heard a preacher among churches of Christ say that the Bible can be used to justify different kinds of church government. Sometimes it is said, "You can prove anything by the Bible." This questions God's integrity. It is insulting to say of a man: "You can prove anything by him." How much worse to say this of a book given to us by God! It contains one consistent message and to make it support contradictory positions requires an abuse of its message.

The Real Problem

The problem is not with the Bible, nor with its source. The problem is the varying approaches to following the Bible. Some believe in a careful adherence to what the Bible says. Others believe in a rather casual following "not of the letter, but of the Spirit," as they put it, adopting the words but not the sense of 2 Corinthians 3:6. Stated another way, some construe the Scriptures strictly, believing that we must do in religion only what the Scriptures authorise. Others construe the Scriptures loosely,

believing that we may practice anything not plainly forbidden.

These two views formed a clear issue between the two great reformers of Germany and Switzerland, Luther and Zwingli. A History of the Christian Church, Lars Qualben explains: "One of the great differences between Zwingli and Luther was: Luther used the Bible as corrective, retaining those rites and ceremonies of the Medieval church which were not positively anti-scriptural. Hence he retained images, altars, ornaments of the churches, organs, church bells, and the like. Zwingli used the Bible as a code of laws, rejecting everything not expressly enjoined in the Scriptures" (p. 255).

Following Recipes and Directions

If a teacher gives a student a recipe for making a cake, what does she expect? If the girl adds ingredients not found in the recipe, will the teacher credit her with following the recipe? Obviously, the student was following the recipe as long as she was using what the recipe required. But when she added other ingredients, she ceased following the recipe and began following her own way.

If a person is given directions for finding a location, what is involved in following those directions? As long as he is making the turns authorised, he is following directions. But when he begins making turns not called for, he has ceased following directions.

Are people actually following the Bible as they follow recipes or directions? The majority of ingredients in modern religion are nowhere authorised in Scripture. They are the products of human wisdom. And it is these additional ingredients, these unauthorised changes of directions that account for the differences that exist in religion.

Sewell Hall

The Life That I Now Live

In my mind, one of the more significant passages in the N.T. is the one where Paul says:

Gal 2:20 "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

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Meeting Times:

Sunday Bible Study: 10:15am
Worship Service: 11:15am
Tuesday Evening Study: 7:30
All Are Very Welcome!

TODAY'S SERVANTS

Song Leader: Noli
Reader: William (Job 40)
Lord's Table: Den
Server: Charles
Opening Prayer: Ethran
Closing Prayer: Shawn

NEXT WEEKS SERVANTS

Song Leader: Den
Reader: Charles (Job 41)
Lord's Table: Shawn
Server: Isaac
Opening Prayer: Jack
Closing Prayer: James O.

Paul was "dead" – yet Paul "lived"!

Without trying to dissect the theological distinctions some are prone to emphasise at such times, consider the extremes that inhere in those words:

"death" – "life"....

"death" – it's before and after implies finality and completeness. His immediate context speaks to the law of Moses; to it he was completely and finally "dead" (this has been his argument in Gal 2 and 3). For him, it had served its purpose, and he was "no longer under" it (Gal 3:24-25). In a broader sense, as is shown in many other places (Rom 6; Col 2 and 3; Eph 4:17-24, etc.) he looked at ALL of his old "life" as one to which he was now "dead". It had lost its appeal, and was now to be totally and finally abandoned, that he might "live" unto God. He was no longer attached to it, and had turned to a "new life" (Rom 6:4; 2 Cor 5:17). He now purposed to "set (his) affections on things above, and not on things of the earth" (Col 3:1-3).

"NEVERTHELESS I LIVE.. This expression is added, as in Gal 2:19, to prevent the possibility of mistake. Paul, though he was crucified with Christ, did not wish to be understood that he felt himself to be dead. He was not inactive; not insensible, as the dead are, to the appeals which are made from God, or to the great objects which ought to interest an immortal mind. He was still actively employed, and the more so from the fact that he was crucified with Christ. The object of all such expressions as this is to show that it was no design of the gospel to make men inactive, or to annihilate their energies. It was not to cause men to do nothing. It was not to paralyse their powers, or stifle their own efforts. Paul therefore says, "I am not dead. I am truly alive; and I live a better life than I did before." Paul was as active after conversion as he was before. Before, he was engaged in persecution; now, he devoted his great talents with as much energy, and with as untiring zeal, to the cause of the great Redeemer. Indeed, the whole narrative would lead us to suppose that he was more active and zealous after his conversion than he was before. The effect of religion is not to make one dead in regard to the putting forth of the energies of the soul. True religion never made one lazy man; it has converted many a man of indolence, and effeminacy, and self-indulgence, to a man actively engaged in doing good. If a professor of religion is less active in the service of God than he was in the service of the world--less laborious, and zealous, and ardent than he was before his supposed conversion--he ought to set it down as full proof that he is an utter stranger to true religion." (Albert Barnes, on Gal 2:20)

I hope and pray that this "death" and "life" is not just a matter of words to us – but of deeds, and even more, of a mind set upon a new direction, an all – consuming interest in a life given over to the One to whom it belongs (Phil 3:10-11).

Aubrey C. Belue