

The Harvester



Preparing Souls

To Serve The Lord



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“New” Anti-ism

By Brian R. Kenyon

Last summer this writer attended a wedding in the auditorium of a church of Christ that, according to the 2008 Guardian of Truth Directory of Churches, stands “opposed to...church support of human institutions (orphan homes, hospitals, old folks homes, colleges, etc.), the sponsoring church arrangement, and church sponsored recreation.” The wedding was beautiful! What struck this writer’s attention, though, was the use of recorded wedding music that contained mechanical instruments of music. There are “regular” churches of Christ that do not even allow that! The use of recorded instrumental music at a wedding in a church building is a matter of judgment, and elderships have every right to decide whether or not it will be allowed in the church buildings they oversee (cf. Heb. 13:7, 17). The point for this study is that here is a congregation that at least one time was on the far right concerning matters of judgment, yet now shows signs of Scriptural balance.

What Is “Anti-ism”?

Simply put, anti-ism can be defined as “binding what God has loosed.” Anti-ism makes stricter the standards of God by binding doctrines that God has not bound (cf. 1 Tim. 4:1-3). This writer has found from his experience in talking with these brethren that the doctrines most of them bind are in the area of expediency (discussed below). Thus, perhaps a more accurate label for these brethren would be “anti-Biblical expediency” brethren. For the most part, these brethren take matters of judgment and bind their opinion as if it were what God had already bound in heaven (Mt. 18:18)! These matters of judgment may include whether or not to build a kitchen in the church building, whether or not to support a benevolent work involving “non-saints” from the church treasury, or whether or not to cooperate with other local churches of Christ in supporting missionary work.

To further illustrate taking matters of judgment and binding opinion as if it were God’s law, consider the point about having a kitchen in the church building. Surely, all rational Bible students would agree that God has authorized a church building. Inherent in God’s requirement to assemble is a place to assemble (cf. Heb. 10:24). A building, of course, is not necessary, but is permitted. A church can assemble by the river or under a tree. Why a local church would want a kitchen in the church building is a matter of judgment. The Bible authorizes members of the church to have fellowship (Acts 2:42; 1 Jn. 1:3), and eating together is one way to show fellowship with one another (cf. 1 Cor. 5:11). Inherent in eating together is food being prepared. Therefore, a church building is authorized to have a kitchen by the authority to have fellowship with one another. Also, when one considers that the first century church often met in people’s houses (Rom. 16:3-5; 1 Cor. 16:19), and people’s houses may have places where food was prepared, one realizes that the place of assembly is not the sacred part about worship, but rather the process and practice (Jn. 4:24).

Is a kitchen necessary? Of course not! In fact, a kitchen may even be detrimental in some buildings because of the attitude of some members. It may be best not to have a kitchen in some circumstances. However, to say that it is wrong in all situations to have a kitchen in the church building because, in one’s own opinion, it is best not to have one in certain situations is anti-ism! For more doctrines of anti-ism answered, see the appendix of our 1999 lectureship book, *What Does It Mean to Be a Christian Like Paul?*, or check our website in *The Harvester* section.

Movement To The Left

Although no amount of anti-ism is good, there is a sense in which the term “new” anti-ism reflects a positive

change. As seen from the wedding at the church building of an "anti" congregation as noted in the beginning of this article, some churches of Christ characterized with anti-ism are seemingly moving left, toward the doctrinal center of the way.

In fact, it is not uncommon to learn from faithful brethren who know and/or have visited congregations that are listed as being opposed to "church support of human institutions (orphan homes, hospitals, old folks homes, colleges, etc.), the sponsoring church arrangement, and church sponsored recreation" that these churches no longer "push" the doctrines that gave them this identity. It seems that the younger members know nothing about the issues that took place, especially in the late 1950's and early 1960's, that resulted in these congregations withdrawing fellowship from those who did not accept their opinions as to how evangelistic and benevolent works should be supported. Because of this, the soil in some instances may be ready to renew fellowship.

Movement To The Right

What is more tragic is that some see a "new" anti-ism developing in the brotherhood today. Some, who previously walked together, seem to have moved apart, and many see this as a mere matter of binding judgment. Are they binding their judgments as if they were God's final word? As a result, they have withdrawn fellowship from all who do not agree with them in every detail of their opinions. Men who previously spoke on lectureships in full fellowship now actively oppose the good efforts of others. It seems that this "new" anti-ism is a repeat of the very same steps that lead to the previous wave of anti-ism in the mid-twentieth century.

Envy And Power Struggle

From interviews this writer has had with Christians who were ac-

tive in the Lord when the anti-ism split occurred in the 1950's and 1960's, it seems that envy and arrogant power struggles were just as much, if not more, the cause of anti-ism among churches of Christ than anything else. Because a certain segment of the brotherhood did not agree with the man chosen to preach on a national radio program sponsored by churches of Christ, that segment not only had nothing to do with that radio program and the churches that sponsored it, but they also actively opposed them. Because an overseas mission work supported by many local American churches was having success, a certain segment of the brotherhood was envious, called the missionary a "Pope," and not only had nothing to do with the mission work and those who supported it, but they also actively opposed them.

Additionally, some reflect upon the "old" anti-ism and see a follow-the-leader type mentality. Brethren did not seem to objectively examine the evidence and act upon it. Rather, they chose to follow the leading spokesmen because of previous relationships.

When one sees the events that seem to be shaping this "new" anti-ism, is it prompted by envy and jealousy and/or a struggle for perceived power? If those events never occurred, would that segment of the brotherhood be acting as they are? Envy is indeed destructive (cf. Mt. 27:18)! Could it be that earthly ties are resulting in the follow-the-leader mentality that characterized "old" anti-ism?

Constant Negativism

In the first chapter of his book, *Lectures on Church Cooperation and Orphan Homes*, Thomas B. Warren warned against the two extremes of liberalism and anti-ism. He mentioned two characteristics of anti-ism that are particularly relevant to the "new" anti-ism of today. First, the anti-ism of the mid-twentieth century was characterized by a "spirit of negativism."¹

By this was meant that anti-ism was so busy saying what the church could *not* do that the church could easily be lulled into thinking that just because it was not doing the things anti-ism said were wrong that it was acceptable to God. Such, however, must not be the case. "But let us not forget that there is also a positive side. The great commission is world-wide; it includes every person on earth....We cannot meet that responsibility by what we do *not* do."² To be sure, we must avoid sin, but we must understand that sin does not necessarily result because one person's judgment on expediency does not agree with another's! The "new" anti-ism is also characterized by a "spirit of negativism," constantly claiming what we cannot do in areas of expediency.

Second, the anti-ism of the mid-twentieth century was characterized by personal attacks and verbal abuse. Warren said, "do not let personal abuse of you cause you to be guilty of abusing others....If someone misrepresents you, do not misrepresent him in return. If someone says ugly things to you, do not say ugly things to him in return" (cf. Mt. 7:12).³ Rather, Warren said pray for such a person because "the fact that

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he does these things proves that he is a soul in deep need."⁴ To read some of the articles written by the "new" anti-ism, one would think they hate brethren and brotherhood efforts to reach the lost. One would think that the people who disagree with their judgments are incarnations of Satan himself!

Understanding Expediency

Since misunderstanding expediency seems to be at the heart of anti-ism, whether "old" or "new," a study of it is appropriate here. In English, the word "expedient" means that which is "useful for effecting a desired result; suited to the circumstances or the occasion; advantageous; convenient."⁵ There is also a negative sense in which the word is used (such as getting gain for oneself regardless of what is right or just), but the basic meaning of the term is that which gives advantage. The English word "expedient" is found seven times in the King James Version (Jn. 11:50; 16:7; 18:14; 1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23; 2 Cor. 8:10; 12:1). The Greek word *sumphero* (συνφέρω), from which "expedient" is translated, occurs in nine other places. It is translated "profit" (1 Cor. 7:35; 10:33; 12:7; Heb. 12:10), "profitable" (Mt. 5:29-30; Acts 20:20), "better" (Mt. 18:6), "is [not] good" (Mt. 19:10), and "brought...together" (Acts 19:19).

Of particular interest are the references in First Corinthians: "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any" (6:12); and "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not" (10:23). In these verses, the Greek word translated "expedient [helpful, NKJ]" (from *sumphero*) means "to help, confer a benefit, be advantageous or profitable or useful...something that is useful or helpful."⁶

Two truths about "expediency" must be realized. First, no unlawful action can be done expediently. That is, there is no circumstance that God allows one to advantageously do something unlawful (cf. Rom. 3:8). Second, merely because an action is lawful does not mean that it is always expedient. All lawful actions do not necessarily edify (1 Cor. 10:23 cf. 1 Cor. 8:1-13). Furthermore, the unlawful pursuit of a lawful thing constitutes bondage, and that results in sin (1 Cor. 6:12 cf. Rom. 6:16).

The principle of expediency applies as follows. All actions must have Bible authority (Col. 3:17 cf. 2 Jn. 9-11). The Bible authorizes by its explicit statements, revealed examples, and implication. These avenues of authority must be ascertained by "handling aright the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15, ASV).

In most authorized actions there are areas of expediency. For example, the Bible authorizes Christians to partake of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week, and that unleavened bread and "fruit of the vine" are to be used (Mt. 26:26-28; Acts 20:7). However, the Bible gives no exclusive pattern as to what time on the first day of the week the Lord's Supper must be served. Thus, the time of day on the first day of the week is a matter of expediency. There is just as much authority for partaking of it at 9:30 a.m. as there is at 2:30 p.m. The congregation (elders, if there are any) must determine which time gives the most advantage. Where there is no exclusive pattern given for fulfilling a God-authorized obligation, and as long as the obligatory action is not altered or omitted, any expedient action (which is not inherently sinful) may be used. Remember, an "expedient" is that which gives advantage.

What is expedient for one congregation may not be so for another. This does not mean that the expedient is unscriptural for the one congregation. By what authority does the "new"

anti-ism tell a congregation across the country what it cannot do in matters of expediency, then break fellowship?

Conclusion

No amount of anti-ism is acceptable to God (cf. Rev. 22:18-19). While there is room for optimism at the "old" anti-ism that seems to be moving back toward the center, there is much disappointment over the "new" anti-ism. Some involved in it witnessed the tragic consequences of anti-ism in the 1960's. All of us should have learned the lessons from history. Why do some bind what God has loosed and/or break fellowship over differences of opinion? Let us endeavor "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3).

Endnotes

¹Thomas B. Warren, *Lectures on Church Cooperation and Orphan Homes* (1958; Jonesboro, AR: National Christian Press, 1963) 35.

²Warren 35.

³Warren 35-36.

⁴Warren 36.

⁵*Webster's New World Dictionary*, Third College Edition, 1986.

⁶Walter A. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd rev. ed. by William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979) 780.

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Returning To Normal

By Gene Burgett

A comment I often hear this time of year is, "I will be when glad when things return to normal." I understand the feelings behind the comment. The month long period between Thanksgiving and New Years is probably the busiest time of the year. In our society we have three major holidays: Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. Of the three holidays just mentioned, two of them are celebrated in the one month period between Thanksgiving and New Years. As we reach the end of that period of time we find ourselves expressing the idea that we are exhausted and look forward to things returning to normal. The question I want us to consider is whether or not returning to normal is really in our best interest spiritually?

What do we mean when we express a desire for life to return to normal? The grammar of the statement clearly refers to a time in the past. Also, the statement obviously harkens to those days prior to what we often call the holiday season. Thus, normal means a desire to return to our spiritual state before Thanksgiving.

The question I want all of us to consider is whether or not a return to normal is really a good thing? Are we saying we were living a more God-conscious life before the advent of the holidays? Truth be known, a great many people probably think very little about God except during the Easter and Christmas holidays.

My concluding thought is this: Do we really want to return to the relationship we had with God prior to Thanksgiving? Are we saying we were living a truly spiritual life until the holidays came along and ruined it all?

Let's resolve to strive for something better than normal. Do not settle for normal. Determine to have a closer relationship with God than the one we had prior to 2008. Make 2008 a year in which we draw closer to God than ever before.

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