

The Problem with Ecumenism

Sermon by Andy Sochor

Text: Ephesians 4:3-6

In the previous lesson, we talked about what would destroy a congregation. One of the things we discussed was a lack of unity. When a congregation is divided, it cannot stand. Yet it is possible to “overcorrect” on the problem of division and go beyond God’s will for our unity. That is what we are discussing in this lesson – unity that is not “of the Spirit” and not based on the “seven ones” in our text. This is very popular today. Yet we need to know what the Bible teaches regarding unity and follow it.

What Is Ecumenism?

- It is the movement to promote unity among religious groups despite differences in doctrines and practices – usually the focus is among “Christian” denominations, yet sometimes the aim is broader
- It is seen in the greater cooperation among different “faiths” – outreach activities, ministries, events, etc.
- Many people see these efforts as being unquestionably good – after all, this is promoting “unity”; yet the “unity” of ecumenism is not the same type of unity described in the Scriptures

The Push for Ecumenism

- Those who advocate for this claim that this is the Lord’s desire (cf. John 17:20-21) – most who advocate for this are likely sincere in their efforts, even if they are misguided
- As the world becomes more wicked and hostile toward anything resembling Christianity, ecumenism provides “Christians” with more support and encouragement
- Ecumenism allows “Christians” to present a stronger front in battles over social issues – there is strength in numbers (cf. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10); many see this as a legitimate application of this principle

What the Bible Says about Ecumenism

- Nothing specifically – why? ... there were no different denominations in the first century; this is significant
- The Bible does talk about unity (John 17:20-21; Ephesians 4:3-6, 13) – but it condemns the concept of denominationalism (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 1:22-23; Acts 2:47)
- So the Bible is for unity but against the division of denominationalism – is “ecumenism” the answer? ... we need to understand what the New Testament teaches about unity

The Unity the Lord Wants Us to Have

- Must be based upon the word taught by the apostles (John 17:20-21)
 - Ecumenism requires us to ignore certain New Testament passages
- This message was for the world (Mark 16:15) – we are to observe all Christ’s commandments (Mattehw 28:20)
 - Ecumenism claims that there are different standards for different people
- The apostles taught the same thing everywhere in every church (1 Corinthians 4:17) – they were to be of the same mind (1 Corinthians 1:10)
 - Ecumenism accepts that every church will teach different things
- Brethren were to hold fast to this standard (2 Timothy 1:13) – from generation to generation (2 Timothy 2:2)
 - Ecumenism tolerates any new doctrine people want to promote
- Those who went beyond this lost their fellowship with God (2 John 9) and with the faithful (2 John 10-11)
 - Ecumenism seeks to maintain fellowship with those who go beyond the doctrine of Christ
- Those teaching a contrary message were to be marked and avoided (Romans 16:17)
 - Ecumenism welcomes those who teach a different doctrine
- Those who would not follow these apostolic traditions were to be avoided as well (2 Thessalonians 3:6)
 - Ecumenism teaches us to extend fellowship to those who reject apostolic tradition

Conclusion

- Ecumenism is NOT the unity described in the New Testament – it is the type of union the apostles warned against
- Rather than accepting anyone and everyone regardless of our differences, we must be “diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3)