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CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE (5)

What If I Refuse To Become A Member of the Lord's Church?

Charles Coats

Let us suppose that today is "Judgment Day." It is our turn to face God and answer for our lives (cf. Rom. 2:6). We know that we had never become a member of the church, even though several people who loved us had shown us the way. As we face God, what do you suppose he would say to us?

In our previous studies, we noted the essentiality of obeying God's commands, in the essentiality of baptism, and we noted that it was through baptism that we become members of the church (I Cor. 12:13). We also saw that it was necessary to be a member of the church to be saved (Eph. 5:23). Concerning this point, let us also note this: (1) Jesus purchased the church, not something else [Acts 20:28]; (2) We are reconciled in the church [Eph. 2:16]; (3) The church is enrolled in heaven [Heb. 12:22, 23]. From this, we can see that if we are not members of the church, we are lost, and our names are not enrolled in heaven. So, "What if I refuse to become a member of the Lord's church?"

Obviously, to know the teachings of the Bible and refuse to obey them is to reject them. Since Christ is the messenger of the Bible (Heb. 1:1, 2), then to reject the Bible's teachings is to reject Christ and His teachings. Also, one can not truly claim to believe something and not act upon its teachings (e.g., If I tell you there is a rattlesnake behind you and you believe me, you will do something to get away from the

snake. If you do not believe me, you will not move). Thus, a person who knows (a claim of belief) and refuses to obey is an unbeliever. Understand this, let us note three scriptures:

"He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my sayings, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day." (John 12:48).

"But for the fearful, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and idolaters, and all liars, their part shall be in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death." (Revelation 21:8).

"and to you that are afflicted rest with us, as at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with the angels of his power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to them who obey not God, and to them that **obey not** the gospel of our Lord Jesus" (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

What will God say to those who refuse to become a member of the church; NOTE: There are those who are members of a denomination who choose to believe their "church doctrine" over God's Word -- they refuse to obey. What will God say to these? God will have to sentence them to eternity in Hell.

Please give prayerful consideration to these things and if you have refused to obey God and become a member of the church that Jesus founded, then let me urge you to do so before it is everlastingly too late.

EUTHANASIA

Charles Coats

Euthanasia is a term that means "easy death." It is employed to describe the merciful killing of a wounded or severely ill animal. It is becoming increasingly popular as a point of discussion in what to do with a severely handicapped or severely ill human being. Many are advocating the use of such ("mercy killing") to take care of these "problems."

Although I have known that many of our scientists and philosophers have been advocating euthanasia for years, I was alarmed to learn how wide-spread this thinking was. Also, I found it remarkable that such is being practiced by some doctors even now.

In the December 1986 issue of LIFE magazine, there is an article entitled, "The Liberation of Lolly and Gronky." This article deals with the choice of these two terminally ill people to take their own lives. The article reveals several interesting details concerning euthanasia.

Note these things:

1. The suicide rate for people over 75 is twice as high as that for teenagers.

2. A recent U.S. opinion poll showed that 76% of the respondents favored passive euthanasia (discontinuing life support devices) and that 62% favored active euthanasia (actually causing death).

3. "Every year more than 5,000 residents of the Netherlands avail themselves of active euthanasia."

4. In the United States, there are at least three organizations whose purpose is to promote

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FULTON COUNTY GOSPEL NEWS

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EUTHANASIA

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euthanasia: The Hemlock Society (13,000 members); Concern for Dying (160,000 members); and, Society for the Right to Die (147,000 members). Hemlock even publishes a book that lists the lethal dosages of 17 prescription drugs and tells you how to kill yourself.

5. In Great Britain, there has been an active organization for euthanasia since 1935. Among its founders were H. G. Wells, A. A. Milne, and George Bernard Shaw.

6. The Voluntary Euthanasia Society of Scotland has 1,600 members and also publishes a book telling you how to kill yourself.

The article also pointed out the fact that some doctors are already practicing euthanasia. Two are quoted, telling how they do it.

"Most of us already do it," says a physician who works with geriatric patients. "We just don't talk about it. We fail to prescribe antibiotics for pneumonia. Or conveniently forget to treat an infection."

"I've said, here are a hundred sleeping pills," says a cancer specialist. "I'm putting them on your bedside table. Be careful not to take more than 25 of them or you'll die."

What is our society coming to?

It seems that more and more of the senior citizens of the world are seeking to end their lives, especially those with terminal illnesses. This is wrong. To kill oneself is murder

and God condemns murder (Ex. 20:13; Rev. 21:8).

What can we do to help; (1) Give them a reason to live [see Matt. 5:16]. (2) Visit them and help them [Jas. 1:27]. (3) Preach the gospel [2 Tim. 4:2; Rom. 1:16]. (4) Show them the sanctity of life [Gen. 1:26, 27; Ex. 21:12-15; Acts 17:25]. (5) Believe that all men are valuable to God. God wants ALL to be saved [old and young alike; Acts 17:30]. (6) Teach them, and learn ourselves, that God has a use for older people. Abraham was 100 when Isaac was born [Gen. 17:17]; Moses was 80 when he faced Pharaoh [Ex. 7:7]; and, Paul, the apostle, described himself as "aged" [Philemon 9].

We need to remember that God wants us to use all our days in service to him. To think about shortening those days would be to rob God of our services. God expects our best (Ecc. 9:10; Col. 3:23), and this includes all the years we have on earth. Rather than seeking to shorten our days, we need to seek ways to lengthen our days.

If we do not do something to change the thinking of mankind, it will not be that long till it will be required of us to kill ourselves or be killed to release a burden on society. Let me urge you to preach the gospel like you never have before in order that we can change the thinking of man. God's Word will not return void (Isa. 55:11); it will change the hearts of men.

SATAN IS NOT DISTURBED BY

1. Religious people as long as they are in religious error.
2. Church attenders who refuse to act upon the messages presented.
3. People who become members as long as they remain inactive, uncommitted and uninvolved.
4. People with great talent as long as they don't use it.
5. People who plan to become Christians as long as they do not execute their plans.

MYOB

By Bill Graddy

MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS is good advice. It takes a degree of self-discipline to do this. No doubt, many tears and heartaches have been the results because we simply will not keep our noses out of other peoples' affairs.

Although the Lord has ordained that we serve Him in local congregations with local autonomy, this does not mean that sister congregations have no responsibility one to the other. The apostle Peter said, "Love the brotherhood" (1 Peter 2:17). Brother Guy N. Woods says of this verse, "The 'brotherhood' is the church of the Lord in its aggregate sense; the affection we are admonished to feel for it is the love which obtains between those of the same family with common parentage, common interests, and common aims." One of the greatest, if not the greatest characteristics of the Lord's church is that we can all believe the same doctrine, yet practice it in local congregations around the whole world. This mark of identification is devastating to the denominational concept! It is an open demonstration of the answer to our Lord's prayer for unity (John 17:20-26). What a blessing it is to travel anywhere in the world and find God's people speaking the same things (1 Cor. 1:10; Philippians 2:1-5). This can be done because we use only the New Testament as our guide! Realizing that the Scripture makes us one, we should be careful always to "stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" (Philippians 1:27).

Sometimes we hear our individuals and congregations hiding behind the phrase **MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS**. A congregation is having doctrinal difficulty. It would appear to be good advice to say to those not members of the congregation to **MYOB**. Yet, it becomes our business when the group teaches false doctrine. Example: Church "A" decides to use an instrument of music in worship. Does this become the

business of members of another congregation? Suppose church "A" stops weekly communion and starts monthly communion. Again, does this become the business of other congregations? If not, how could they be marked (Romans 16:17)? How could fellowship be withdrawn from those who walk disorderly, if it is none of our business what others do (II Thessalonians 3:6)? Would not our "love for the brotherhood" suggest we should help them to return to the old paths (Jeremiah 6:16; Galatians 5:4)? Even so, if a congregation is teaching and practicing false doctrine relative to the duties and responsibilities of the elders, then it becomes our business to make this known to all (Acts 5:11; 15:4). When elders take the position that they do not have to "show and tell" (keeping the members informed, abreast, and knowledgeable of the work of the church) they are "being lords over God's heritage . . ." (1 Peter 5:3). Elders should be just as free with what the money is being spent for as they are in asking for it!

Local autonomy is not a license to "lording" the matters of the church over the flock. Local autonomy does not give the elders the right to perpetuate the eldership. Local autonomy does not mean infallibility of elders. Local autonomy does mean that God through the Scripture has authorized a group of believers to set themselves apart as a congregation selecting elders to oversee them and function according to the pattern of the Scripture and execute the work of the church (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-4). The New Testament is the legislation; the elders see that it is practiced and taught, serving as leaders, not bosses, out front, setting the right examples in all things blameless (1 Peter 5:1-4; 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6). The very moment an elder or elders become self-willed, stubborn, and refuses to talk with the members and discuss the affairs of the church with them, he and they should be recalled and asked to resign by the same people who appointed them, members of the church, in the first place. This is a two way street and therefore, members should be just as honest and

open and above board in all their dealings with the elders as the elders should be with the members (Hebrews 13:7, 17). If both elders and members would provide things honest in the sight of each other and God, then the church would not have lawsuits and divisions among themselves (Romans 12:17; 2 Corinthians 8:21). The shame and reproach brought upon the Lord's church by such ungodly men and women will not go unnoticed either in this world or the world to come. It will take years to live down the bad example.

Surely there are enough wise men among congregations to settle problems without having "to go to law with brothers, and that before the unbelievers" (1 Corinthians 6:1-8). Shame! In Matthew 18:15-18, the formula is too simple to be misunderstood. These two passages are sufficient to keep down all strife and seduction if brethren would only apply them and practice them, the reproach brought on the Lord's church notwithstanding.

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A Modern house is one where a switch regulates everything but the children.

Shall The Court Decide The Truth?

Bill Graddy

The New Testament teaches that brethren should not "go to law" (1 Corinthians 6:1) with each other. If they do, the only part of the Judge is to see that the legal proceedings of the case are followed. Since the Judge is not to settle the scriptural differences between brethren, then why go to court? If we allow the Court to render a decision in the matter, then, we must accept and obey his version of the truth. This would be contrary to 1 Corinthians 6:5, as brethren are to settle their own doctrinal differences!

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IN RESPONSE

Charles Coats

In a recent issue of UPREACH MAGAZINE, there is an article called "The Great Church House Myth," by Sandra Woodruff Milholland. I felt that this article needed to be answered. In my article, I will quote some of the things said and answer them. Her article can be found on pages 13 and 14 of UPREACH. If you have a copy, please read the article.

On page 13, this quote is found, "Another church house myth is that people who go to church are supposed to be good examples to everybody all the time, without fail or else they're hypocrites." I realize that people do sin, but we are still supposed to be good examples (1 Peter 2:11, 12; Matthew 5:16; 1 Timothy 4:12). In fact, when we do sin, we are supposed to ask for forgiveness, and thus doing, we will show others how a Christian reacts to sin.

She goes on to cite an example, "I was sitting in church one morning and an alcoholic led the opening prayer . . . but bless his heart, he's turned his life around . . ." This I find amazing. How can a person turn his life around and still be an alcoholic? Repentance demands a change (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 26:20; Matthew 3:8). If this man is truly penitent and has "turned his life around," he will no longer be an alcoholic.

A further paragraph has this statement, "Maybe you are afraid you can't live up to the standards in a church. Well, welcome to the club. NONE OF US CAN" (emp. mine C.C.). This I find in stark contrast to what GOD said in John 14:15 and 1 John 5:3. I also note that Paul said he had "kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7). It is also remarkable that God would give us a word we can't follow (see her quote), and yet judge us by the same (John 12:48).

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IN RESPONSE

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Another part reads thusly:

"One of the myths about church is that everybody has to know a lot of religious STUFF (rather disrespectful, C.C.) and be able to look up scriptures in the Bible. Believe me, that isn't the MOST IMPORTANT thing. What is important? You. You're important..." (emp. mine, C.C.)

While I realize that people are important, they are not more important than God's Word! This is the gospel of self, and is condemned in Galatians 1:6-10. The author will contradict this statement only four paragraphs later when she says, "if they (those in the local church, C.C.) don't seem to care, and if GOD AND HIS WORD are not being honored, look further" (emp. mine C.C.).

Other points could be mentioned, but this is enough to help us see the danger of Sandra Woodruff Milholland's article. Although I do not know the lady and bear her no ill will, I will say that she is wrong in her article. While she puts forth the idea that the church is composed of people rolling in sin and still acceptable to God, Jesus said he would present his bride "holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:27).

MAY GOD BE FOUND TRUE,
AND ALL MEN LIARS (Romans 3:4).

* * *

"If you are not as close to God as you used to be, do not make a mistake about which one has moved."

* * *

"A pessimist has no motor; an optimist has no brakes."

Those who are ashamed of the past and afraid of the future don't find the present so good either.

* * *

Many a man throws his tongue into high gear before he gets his brain going.

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2, 3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God's commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

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