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ANTI, LIBERAL or SIMPLY A CHRISTIAN? (3)

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In article 1 we covered the fact that labels have a legitimate use as descriptions of attitudes & conduct; but that labels can also be abused. In article 2 we have seen how brethren have attempted to justify musical instruments in worship, missionary societies, the sponsoring church arrangement and various centralization schemes, which are contrary to what God has revealed about the worship & organization of the local church. First attempts were made to justify these unscriptural practices by scripture. But when those attempts were exposed, more and more turned to labels and misrepresentation. The effects of such tactics linger until this day, so that whole new generations have arisen who have never thoroughly examined the doctrinal positions. And yet, these new generations are still warned about those evil & unloving "Antis".

Let us now look at orphan's homes. Many accuse the "Antis" of not caring about widows and orphans. At least, this is what many have been told through the years. But the Truth is I do not know of anyone who is opposed to taking care of widows and orphans! All the "Antis" I know will tell you, me and everyone who is willing to listen, that the Bible clearly says that widows & orphans are to be looked after. The question is not whether they should be cared for, but HOW does God say to care for them?

Clearly, the church can take care of SOME widows (Acts 6:1-6). Are there any limits, any guidelines given by God? Yes. 1 Tim. 5:3-16 reveals that church benevolence is LIMITED to "widows indeed". Who is a "widow indeed"? One who has no physical family to assist (5:4-8). **Family** is to shoulder this responsibility, and this is **not** to "burden" the church (5:16). Yet, what is the tendency of mankind? If someone else will take care of it, pay for it, see to it... let THEM do it; even when it is in reality **our own reasonability!** So, when brethren burden the church unnecessarily, they **sin** against their family responsibilities AND **sin** against the work God has assigned the church! That is no laughing matter.

Furthermore, "widows indeed" must be faithful and proven saints, at least 60 years old, having proved their dedication to God by service (5:5-6, 9-10). If a widow does NOT meet these requirements, we would be sinning in allowing the church to take care of her.

In fact, Paul illustrates & emphasizes limits of benevolence by saying "younger widows refuse" - because they can get married again, raise children, lead productive lives, and will be tempted to be idle and get in

trouble if they do not have appropriate responsibilities to fulfill (5:11-15).

Yes, the church may help "widows indeed", but some do not heed the words of the Holy Spirit... for they use church funds to help widows who could get help elsewhere, and widows who are not even saints! Since we "Antis" do not "go with the flow", we have been painted as "unloving" and "anti" or "against" widows. Do not be deceived. We are not "anti-widows", rather we are PRO-obedience to God.

Also, we "Antis" are accused of "hating orphans". But this is not true either. It is just more labeling and misrepresentation. We care for orphans **in the way God says to care for them**. I want us to note that every passage that describes the need to visit & care for orphans, addresses NOT the church, but the individual. For example, James 1:26-27 - "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

James 1 addresses individual responsibility toward orphans & widows, not church responsibility. Note also that no qualifications are given here about whether these widows & orphans are family members or even Christians. The church's benevolence **is limited**, while the individual's responsibility **is broader**. As Gal. 6:10 says, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." As individuals, we must still emphasize & give preference to needy saints. But, as we have opportunity we are also to do good toward ALL men. Again, the individual is given a broader range of authority for benevolence than the church is. So, if respecting this God given distinction makes us "Anti", I guess Paul was an "Anti" too. And the Holy Spirit who inspired him. And Jesus who gave the words to the Holy Spirit. And the Father who gave these words to Jesus...

God's way promotes direct action & direct responsibility. Man's way tends to centralize activity and remove it from the realm of personal & individual responsibility. God's way gets YOU active physically & spiritually, while man's way tends toward paying someone else to do YOUR JOB for you. But you can no more pay someone to pray in your place, sing in your place or take the Lord's Supper in your place - than you can pay someone else to fulfill YOUR responsibilities. Now I am not saying we can never use medical facilities, nurses, etc. There are times when such services are needed, since most of us are not doctors or nurses. But I am talking about "church supported" institutions for orphans, etc. The church has no right, no authority to "support" an orphanage or home for the elderly than it does to "support" a hospital, convalescence home, funeral home, fire department, police department, etc. It is one thing to take care of "widows indeed" as God directs, buying & paying for the services needed to fulfill that obligation; it is entirely another to have "our" orphanage, "our" old folks home, "our" college, etc. - "supported by churches of Christ".

The Bible constantly & consistently makes a distinction between individual responsibility and church responsibility. Sometimes there may be areas that seem similar, but this does not mean they are identical. For example, in Matt. 18:15-17 we read that when a brother sins

we are to go to them and tell them their fault. This is individual action. If he doesn't listen, then bring witnesses. This also is individual action, even though multiple people are involved. Then if he doesn't hear, bring it to the church. Only after the prior 2 steps is "the church" now involved. There is a distinction between what we are to do as individuals and as a church. And again, in this same case, the actions are similar (identifying a fault & trying to bring repentance), but the duty begins FIRST with the individuals, and only later the church gets involved under the specified circumstances.

This also is comparable to the social gospel approach to preaching. Brethren are engaged in building "fellowship" halls (really social halls, kitchens), basketball gyms, playgrounds, "church camps", etc. But where is any of this authorized? Do we not recall the abuse of the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor. 11:17-34? Some reply to this saying that Paul only wanted them to stop abusing the Lord's Supper. They add that this did not mean they should stop eating together as a congregation. Instead of creating our own interpretation, why not consider what Paul **actually said?**

1Co 11:22 "What? **have ye not houses** to eat and to drink in? or **despise ye the church of God**, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not." Did Paul praise or condemn their meal? Yes, they had bad attitudes. But Paul addressed MORE than just attitudes, he also addressed the meal itself! He said that eating & drinking as a congregation was in reality "despising the church of God"! And he said, "And if any man hunger, **let him eat at home**; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come." (1 Cor. 11:34) Paul's orders were to NOT EAT as a congregation, as an activity of the church. Yes "the rest" Paul would set in order, but he ALSO said if you are hungry eat at home. To ignore this is to ignore a command of the Lord (1 Cor. 14:37). He didn't say we couldn't eat together. He DID say not to involve the church in common meals.

Some may admit that "common meals" are excluded, by appeal to "fellowship meals" saying they are the "love feasts" of Jude 12. But speculation is not the same as proving permission. Jude indeed refers to "love feasts" - but what were they? Literal or figurative? Examine the immediate context and you will see MUCH figurative language - people compared to rocks, abusive shepherds, clouds without water, autumn trees, etc. In such a context, how can we prove authority for a literal feast? It is exceedingly shaky ground upon which to base a practice!

Now please understand, no one is against incidental eating in the building. Workers work on the building and eat a snack or lunch there, then continue working. Sometimes preacher's have an office there, and eat lunch. Babies take bottles from their parents. But none of these becomes an end in itself, attached to the church, a "congregational" function! We do not announce from the pulpit or in our bulletins, "Bottle feeding for babies, Sunday morning at 9 am!" Nor do we announce "Preacher's lunch break, noon Monday-Saturday at his office!" Just like the Temple of the Old Law involved sacrifices of animals, and animals had to be brought in, killed & cleaned in order to fulfill that, that did not in

anyway justify the Jews who started **buying & selling animals in the Temple courtyard!** They turned incidental activity into a **function of the Temple**; and brethren today are doing the same. Buy & sell your animals in the marketplace, not the Temple. Buy, sell & rent your meal hall else where. Eat your meals "at home", not as a part of the function of church. Again, eating meals & socialization & entertainment are all fine in themselves, but why would we ever want to start blurring the lines between what the church is authorized to do and what we do as individuals?

Submission to God means we do all things His way, even when it may seem better to us or more convenient for us to do it differently. Just do it God's way. Perhaps you will be seen as "Anti-social", but so what? As it is written in 1Cor 14:

"37 If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the **commandments** of the Lord.

38 But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant."

To God be the glory, forever & ever. Amen.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

- **Men's & Ladies Classes** - Every 2nd Sun. @ 5pm.
- **Home Bible Study** – Sat., Nov. 11 & 25.
- **Business Meeting** – Sun. Nov. 26 @ 5pm.
- **GM in Knoxville** - Doug Hill, Nov. 17-19, 2006.
- **GM** - Jeff Smith, April 15-20, 2007.
- **GM** - R. McPherson, Oct.14-19, 2007.
- **GM** - TBA April 2008.
- **GM** - Lanny Smith, Oct.12-17, 2008.

PRAY FOR

Mag Bumbalough, Thelma Cunningham, Mary Cox, Monie Petty, Dave Poteet, Joshua & Misty Poteet, Rose Taylor, Dorris Williams, Robert England, Johanna Fletcher, Ed Williams, Joe Smith (cancer), Lydia Poe, Mike Tenpenny (back), Thelma Klein, . Also, Sierra Frasier (arm), Reba Jones (Dorris Williams' niece), Jackie Tindle (cancer, relative of the Sims), Holly Jernigan (Joyce Gardner's niece), John Ross Key (Mary Cox's son), Marci Miller (Alisa Fletcher's mother), Ocia Bell Jones (Doris William's mother), Ruth Williams (Betty England's niece), Pauline Hickey, Nanny Wtaker, Dylan Roberts (grandson of Marilyn's friend).

1Samuel 15

22 And Samuel said, Hath Jehovah as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of Jehovah? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.

23 For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as idolatry and teraphim. Because thou hast rejected the word of Jehovah, he hath also rejected thee from being king.