

DENOMINATIONALISM IS DANGEROUS

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Denominationalism stands for division among believers in Christ and is, therefore, sinful. Jesus prayed, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me" (Jn. 17:20-23).

One reason denominationalism is dangerous is because it advances its insidious error at the point of enormous material wealth. Who has not encountered the challenge of greater numbers, bigger buildings, and more elaborate services when trying to teach the gospel to those slain by the sights and sounds of denominationalism?

A currently mammoth-sized effort being made by those in denominationalism is the Promise Keepers organization. As those who have followed their efforts know, the Promise Keepers were founded in 1990 by the former University of Colorado head football coach Bill McCartney, who serves as the president of the organization. In the decade of the nineties thousands have assembled in mass meetings in stadiums and coliseums at the beck and call of McCartney. Recently, the PK organization sent a video to churches throughout the region entitled "Hope For A New Millennium." A tract accompanying the forty minute video gives the "Statement Of Faith" of the PKs which is, of course, another man-made creed to add to the hundreds already in existence which insures more division among suggested believers in Christ.

An item within the creed of the PKs is deserving of the attention of the churches of Christ in view of the rise of the Community Church movement in Memphis relative to the work of the Holy Spirit. The Creed of the PKs states, "WE BELIEVE in the personality and deity of the Holy Spirit, that He performs the miracle of the new birth in an unbeliever and indwells believers, enabling them to live a godly life."¹ A creed is unnecessary wherein it states something that the Word of God already affirms, and one place where it is a tool for the advancement of error is where it teaches something the Word of God does not teach. Peter said,

"If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Pet. 4:11).

The PK Creed says the Holy Spirit performs "the miracle of the new birth in an unbeliever." The new birth is not the result of a miracle but is the result of the message of the Holy Spirit. John 3:1-8 explains the new birth, and Jesus said it is "of water and of the Spirit." By the teaching of the Holy Spirit, who cannot be separated from the Word of God He has inspired (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:20-21), obedient believers are baptized in water and are "raised to walk in newness of life" (Titus 3:5; 1 Cor. 12:13; Rom. 6:3-5). Jesus said, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

So, the PK organization teaches conversion to Christ to be miraculous. Who then is responsible for the observation that most of the people in this world are not Christians? Since man cannot perform miracles and the Holy Spirit must work a miracle to bring about the new birth, the Holy Spirit would be responsible for not working more miracles of the new birth. False! False! False! The Lord commissioned disciples to "go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mk. 16:15). The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16), not some supposed "miracle of the new birth."

The PK Creed states further that the Holy Spirit "indwells believers, enabling them to live a godly life."² In the video, McCartney observed that more divorces are now being granted for believers than for non-believers. Where does the problem lie if the Holy Spirit enables believers to live a godly life? Is this not a negative reflection on the Holy Spirit? If the divorcing believers cannot help but divorce, why does not the Holy Spirit do more "enabling"? Paul said, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly . . ." (1 Tim. 4:1), what the believers need to do is hear what the Spirit says, "Husbands love your wives" (Eph. 5:25).

Surely, the danger of the popular denominational doctrine of the direct operation of the Holy Spirit is exposed in these observations. How much then do those brethren affiliated with and promoting the Community Church in general and in the Community Church in Memphis in particular need to see the dependency upon and the identity with denominationalism represented by like views of the work of the Holy Spirit?

In a creedal statement written October 5, 1997, by erring brethren Gary Ealy and John Mark Hicks with the title "A Theological And Strategic Statement For A New Church Planting," it is stated, "The Holy Spirit works powerfully in the lives of believers to produce his fruit, and, while he no longer distributes miraculous gifts to believers in the post-apostolic period (e.g., investing the gift of healing in specific individuals), he is not thereby limited from acting in miraculous ways according to God's good pleasure."³ The same critique of the PK's Creed applies with equal force to the Creed of the Community Church. Neither honor the Holy Spirit and His work through the Word of God.

The danger of the alluring attraction of denominationalism should be avoided by members of the Lord's church today. Denominationalism has nothing to offer the growth of the churches of Christ. The excitement of great numbers was cautioned against by Jesus Christ, "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! For so did their fathers to the false prophets" (Lk. 6:26). Growth in numbers and in Christian character come from God, not man. In 1 Corinthians 3:7, Paul wrote, "God giveth the increase."

A shift of emphasis away from denominationalism needs to take place. Peter admonished, "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen" (2 Pet. 3:18). The growth and advancement of the Cause of Christ must take place through proclaiming, practicing, and defending the gospel of Christ. The Psalmist wrote, "I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name" (Psa. 138:2). Paul said, "But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel" (Phil. 1:17).

ENDNOTES

¹*Hope For A New Millennium* brochure, p. 8.

²*Ibid.*

³*A Theological And Strategic Statement For A New Church Planting*, p. 6.