

RECENT BILLY GRAHAM ARTICLE REVIEWED¹

Gary McDade

Perhaps in view of the support of the “Billy Graham Crusade” in Nashville, Tennessee last June by the Woodmont Hills Church of Christ where Rubel Shelly is the minister and where many teachers at Lipscomb University attend, among them John Mark Hicks, co-founder of the Cordova Community Church in Memphis, a review of a recent “Billy Graham” article which appeared in the Memphis *Commercial Appeal* would among other purposes show why such efforts ought to be opposed and rejected by faithful Christians and sound congregations. In typical fashion Graham poses a question, at least purported to be from a reader, and then gives his response. His question is:

“Does any one denomination have a corner on the truth? I grew up in a little church that seemed to think it was the only way to heaven (or at least that’s the impression they gave). Now that I’m older, I can’t agree.”

There is no indication given as to who the querist may be or of what religious affiliation he may be a member. If the individual was a member of the church of Christ, then he either had not been properly taught or he did not obtain a proper understanding of the teaching he received, for the truth, the word of God (John 17:17), nowhere mentions divine acknowledgment or acceptance of denominations. Therefore, it simply cannot be that any one of them has “a corner on the truth” because not a single one of them owes its existence to the truth. If any one of them did a person could open his Bible and read, for example, about the Baptist Church of which Graham is a member and Shelly, Woodmont Hills Church of Christ, and Lipscomb University (at least in part) are supporters. Jesus Christ, who built his church (Matt. 16:18), spoke of his will concerning his followers “that they all may be one...that they also may be one in us...that they may be one, even as we are one...that they may be made perfect in one” (John 17:20-23). The truth of God states, “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (I Cor. 1:10). So, no *denomination* has a “corner on the truth” because no denomination is of the truth. The apostle John wrote, “We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error” (I John 4:6). When people do not adhere to the teachings of the inspired apostles they are in error.

Graham's answer is presented in four paragraphs. The first one reads,

"I'm sure we'd all like to think that our own church or denomination is the right one, but God's truth isn't limited to any single group."

Certainly, Graham would like for his Baptist Church to be "the right one" and because of that belief he upholds teaching peculiar to the Baptist Church which differs with the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Pentecostal Church, and others. So, please, note that Graham is on record as saying he would like to think his church is "the right one." A weakening of prejudice against the church of Christ results when this fact is held in evidence.

Although Graham said, "God's truth isn't limited to any single group," the Bible said, "But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (I Tim. 3:15). If "the church of the living God" is not a "single group," then "the house of God" cannot be a "single group." Yet, "the house of God" has one head (Heb. 3:6), one founder (Heb. 12:2; Luke 1:33), one purpose (Mark 3:25), and one destiny (John 14:2).

The second paragraph reads,

"Churches differ on minor issues, such as how they govern themselves or what they do in their worship services. This isn't necessarily wrong in God's eyes, because He hasn't given us exact instructions on every detail of church life in the Bible."

Again, Graham is in error, for, indeed, God has given us exact instructions on the government and worship of the church. A denial of this fact constitutes a denial of Isaiah 9:6-7 where Isaiah prophesied that "the government shall be upon his [Christ's] shoulder" and he would "order it." It is not a "minor issue" to deny this sacred text.

Worship services must reflect what the Lord authorized (John 4:24; I Cor. 14:40), and if "what they do in their worship services" is in error it can cost them their souls (Acts 5:1-11; I Cor. 11:17-34).

The third paragraph reads,

"But all churches and denominations that truly seek to follow Christ agree on the central truths of the Gospel: that Jesus was the divine Son of God, sent from

heaven to save us from our sins by His death and Resurrection. They all agree we need Christ to save us, that we need to follow Christ and seek to do His will 'on Earth as it is in heaven' (Matthew 6:10)."

Those Graham mentions may agree in principle, but they clearly do not agree in practice because they insist on remaining in man-made denominations none of which are more than five hundred years old. They cannot be fellowshipped (II John 9-11).

The fourth paragraph reads,

"Don't let your disagreement with a few Christians from your past keep you from Christ. He is the one who came to save you and the one you will meet in eternity. God loves you and wants you to come to know Him in a personal way. Open your heart to Christ and discover the joy of following Him."

Graham's close is the Calvinistic presentation of the direct operation of the Holy Spirit as he urged, "Open your heart to Christ." The Lord opens peoples' hearts with the apostles' doctrine (Acts 16:14-15; 2:42), and the teaching that people are saved anywhere but in Christ and in his church is not the apostles' doctrine (Rom. 12:4-5; Eph. 1:3, 21-23; 4:4; 5:23). Members of the churches of Christ are not the only ones who are going to heaven; they are the only ones who have a chance! (Rom. 16:16; Matt. 7:13-14).

ENDNOTES

1Mr. Graham's impaired health has been a subject of public notification, yet the "Billy Graham" newspaper column continues to be printed as if the material currently is being written by him. While we doubt it is current, the reference to the article under review as "recent" is attributable to the fact of its recent publication in the Memphis *Commercial Appeal* (February 2001).