

## Issues That Divide Brethren

**A**mong brethren who first began with the intent of restoring non-denominational New Testament faith there have been a number of issues that have arisen in the 19th and 20th centuries that have divided brethren.

Though we appeal to the world to find unity in the simple teachings of the New Testament, such divisions have hindered the cause of Christ and our own credibility. In some cases these divisions involve brethren imposing what they believe to be liberties upon brethren find no biblical authority for a particular practices. In so doing the Lord's body is splintered brethren bring disgrace upon themselves.

To resolve this error we must understand the issues that have led brother to stand against brother and ask ourselves how God's word authorizes us to conduct ourselves.



**Instrumental Music.** One of the first issues that initiated division in the 19th century was the question of whether the Bible authorizes the use of mechanical instruments in church worship. The New Testament is silent on the matter. Though it commands singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16), there is no scriptural authorization for instrumental accompaniment. To insist on using such additions in worship forces brethren to do what the Bible does not instruct.



### **The Missionary Society.**

Another issue that divided brethren in the last century was the creation of manmade organizations to coordinate the support of preachers in other places. Under this scheme different churches supported a society, which in turn supported and sent out preachers. This scheme surrendered the responsibility of the local church to a separate man-made organization. In the Bible churches supported and sent out preachers themselves with no separate institution between the church and the preacher (Acts 13:1-3; Philippians 4:10-20).



### **Bible Classes.**

Some brethren in this country have had concerns about whether the church is authorized to support and conduct Bible classes for all ages. Two of the main concerns about this are 1) Does this surrender parental responsibility? and 2) Should there be women teachers? The Bible makes it clear that in the assembly women are to be silent (1 Corinthians 14:34) and that they must not teach over men (1 Timothy 2:12), yet at the same time women are instructed to be **“teachers of good things”** (Titus 2:3). Though it is clear that the primary responsibility for spiritual teaching of children rests with parents (Ephesians 6:4), the church is authorized to support the teaching of God's word in and out of the assembly (1 Corinthians 14:26; Philippians 4:10-20). While we must not make Bible classes into anything more than simply Christians teaching one another, the concept of the church supporting the teaching of God's word is authorized.



### **One Cup in the Lord's Supper.**

Among some brethren the question of whether it is right to use multiple cups in the taking of the Lord's Supper has led to division. While the Bible does refer to the **“cup of blessing”** (1 Corinthians 10:16) it is clear from the events described at the institution of the Lord's supper that before the supper Jesus gave them the cup and said **“Take this and divide it among yourselves”** then after their meal identified the memorial significance of it (Luke 22:17,20). Many who hold the one cup view believe that the cup itself represents the New Covenant. The Bible makes it clear that there are two elements in the memorial (not three) and that it is a covenant of blood which is symbolized (1 Corinthians 10:16; Matthew 26:27-28).



### **Support Of Human Organizations.**

In the last century a cause of great division among many brethren has been the question of whether the church is authorized to financially support organizations that are set up by Christians to perform worthwhile services. Organizations that were initially at the heart of the controversy were Bible colleges and orphans homes. Now the question has expanded to church supported hospitals, student centers, camps, etc. Unfortunately, this often becomes a very emotional question rather than a simple question of biblical authority. If spiritual education and benevolence are the responsibility of the church what right do we have to surrender this responsibility to another organization? On the other hand, if

the activity concerns something that is not an authorized work of the church we have no right to support it from the church collection.



**The Social Gospel.** In the late 20th century the church also found itself confronted with issues about its role in the social life of its members. Beyond acts of collective worship which the Bible authorizes, some brethren have insisted that the church sponsor meals, “get togethers,” and young people’s entertainment. While it is clear that Christians should be involved in each others’ lives beyond the assembly (Acts 2:46), the Bible also warns that we must not confuse the social and the spiritual (1 Corinthians 11:22, 27-34). This distorts the work and purpose of the church.



**The Sponsoring Church.** Much like the missionary society of the 19th century, this modern innovation in the support of preaching involves churches sending money to one central church to support project a single church could not do by itself. We note again that in Scripture church contributions were used to directly support preachers (Philippians 4:10-20). The only cause for which support was sent from one church to another was benevolence (Acts 11:27-30). This was not passed on through the receiving church to another place. It was for their own relief.



**The Discipling Movement.** Near the end of the 20th century some brethren began to take a much more aggressive posture towards evangelism. In the Boston area this involved the adoption of an unscriptural organizational structure and methods of accountability that are not taught in Scripture. This movement allowed a single church to oversee what it referred to as “home churches.” Regions of the country were divided into districts of oversight. Converts were required to engage in a set amount of daily Bible study and confess their sins to special sponsors (who were not required to confess to them in return). While we want to see the church grow, if we abandon an insistence upon Biblical authority for what we do, we are nothing more than just another denomination.

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