

ILLINOIS LUTHERAN CONFERENCE

Topical Bulletin, April 2021

The topic to be considered in this month's bulletin is certainly relevant in this day and age in which we observe all sorts of joint activities being promoted among churches of varied beliefs. The question for consideration is: **What is religious unionism and is it a God-pleasing practice?** As usual, the Holy Bible will supply the proper answers and guidance we need.

First, let us understand the terminology involved. "God-pleasing" practices are only those things done in full accord with God's Word, the Holy Bible, because:

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Timothy 3:16-17) "Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way. Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." (Psalm 119:104-105)

"Religious unionism" is joining in religious worship or in religious work or in both by such as are NOT in doctrinal agreement. Religious unionism is not an attempt to unite on the basis of doctrine, but decidedly ignores doctrinal differences, choosing rather to agree to disagree. Religious unionism does not stress purity of doctrine in accord with the Holy Bible, and does not seek to purify the visible Christian Church of false doctrines and false teachers, but rather does the exact opposite. Religious unionism's intentional purpose is to give various and varying religious opinions not only a place in the Church, but also in the same church-body. However, Holy Writ rhetorically asks:

"Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3)

Those who desire religious unionism are known as "unionists" and propound the so-called "ecumenical movement" which is the idea of uniting churches without doctrinal agreement. "Deeds not creeds" is the slogan of the unionists. However, the Holy Bible informs us that true unity demands full doctrinal agreement:

"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." (1 Corinthians 1:10)

"To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." (Isaiah 8:20)

"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." (Ephesians 4:1-6)

Comment: Observe the necessity of being of the same mind in full accord with God's Holy Word in the one true faith in the one true God.

The proponents of religious unionism have no desire to contend for the faith once delivered unto the saints, no wish to fight for doctrinal truth, and yet the Bible says:

“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” (Jude 3)

Comment: There is but one faith by which people are saved, and that is faith in Jesus Christ as one’s personal Savior and Lord! “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” (John 3:16-18)

The early Christians considered matters of doctrine – “One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all” – very important, yea vital, and all Christians today are to do likewise:

“And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” (Acts 2:42)

“But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

(2 Timothy 3:14-15)

Comment: Note well the vital necessity of continuing in the apostle’s doctrine— the doctrines drawn from the Holy Scriptures and centered on Christ Jesus the Savior!

The Holy Bible instructs Christians to SEPARATE from those who teach false doctrine, NOT to join with them:

“If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.” (1 Timothy 6:3-5)

“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.”

(Romans 16:17-18)

“Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.” (2 John 9-11)

Comment: Holy Writ is clear! Withdraw from false teachers and their false doctrines; mark and avoid them; don’t be partaker with the evil deeds of those who have NOT the doctrine of Christ! DO NOT PRACTICE RELIGIOUS UNIONISM!

Jesus warns against false prophets, and never bids Christians to join with them, for they endanger faith:

“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.” (Matthew 7:15)

“For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.” (Matthew 24:24)

We must beware of lying, flattering tongues— those who will say anything to move people to unite in joint worship and church-work without first obtaining genuine unity in Biblical doctrine:

“Help, LORD; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men. They speak vanity every one with his neighbour: with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak.” (Psalm 12:1-2)

“Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets.” (Luke 6:26)

“Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.” (John 8:44)

The Holy Bible teaches us Christians that we are to pray FOR all people, NOT WITH all people:

“I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour.” (1 Timothy 2:1-3)

Jesus NEVER joined together in worship and church-work with participants and promoters of false doctrine, such as the Pharisees; rather, Jesus said:

“Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.” (Matthew 15:14)

The Holy Bible does NOT tell us to separate from the world and live like hermits, nuns, and monks. However, WE ARE to separate from impenitent followers of false doctrines and practices when it comes to church-fellowship:

“I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.” (1 Corinthians 5:9-13)

True love of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ demands proper spiritual discernment and righteous judgment in accord with the Holy Bible:

“Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil.” (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22)

“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” (1 John 4:1)

Some common activities of those practicing religious unionism include: joint prayer sessions, ecumenical choir and band sessions, ministerial associations, pulpit sharing, open Communion (altar fellowship with any and all who approach), joint so-called "mission work" such as quilting, food and clothing drives and sales, social programs, and the like. Religious unionism may please the world and definitely pleases the devil, but all the afore-quoted Scripture passages prove that such activities are NOT pleasing to God since doctrinal truth is ignored. Religious unionism is greatly displeasing to the Lord! Religious unionism is a danger to the Christian's faith! Religious unionism attempts to correct society's evils with external patching, when the fact remains that sinners need an internal cure – a new heart – before society can truly improve, for Jesus says:

"out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man..." (Matthew 15:19-20)

The real and ONLY purpose of the Christian Church in this world is the salvation of sinners and the glory of God! God is NOT glorified and sinners are NOT saved when God's truth is denied! People need God's truth! Jesus says:

"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6)

"If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31-32)

Only God can give a new heart:

"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them."

(Ezekiel 36:26-27)

God the Holy Ghost gives a new heart – regenerates a person – by means of the Gospel of Christ through which He works:

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." (Romans 1:16-17)

"Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." (1 Peter 1:23)

All people NEED the LORD JESUS CHRIST!

"In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 John 4:9-10)

"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

Jesus died for you and for me! Jesus loves us! Let us show we love Jesus by avoiding those things which displease Him, including religious unionism, for the Lord Jesus instructs:

"If ye love me, keep my commandments." (John 14:15)

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