

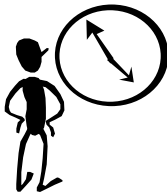
THE BATTLE CREEK BULLETIN

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Time of Assembly



Sunday:

Bible Study 4:00 p.m.
Worship 5:00 p.m.

Wednesday:

Bible Study 7:00 p. m.

God Expects Us to Think

By Steven Harper

According to a well-known American philosopher, "A man full of faith is simply one who has lost (or never had) the capacity for clear and realistic thought" [H.L. Mencken]; another one said, "What has religion to do with facts? Nothing" [Robert Green Ingersoll]; and "Star Trek" creator and producer, Gene Roddenberry, said, "For most people, religion is nothing more than a substitute for a malfunctioning brain." This is what the world thinks about people like you and me, who believe in God, that Jesus Christ was real, that He was indeed the Son of God, and that he came down to earth from heaven and died for our sins. According to these men, we are mindless idiots who are incapable of reasoned thought and wouldn't know the difference between black and white, up from down, or left from right. Keep in mind, though, that God has said something about these men, too (cf. Psalms 14:1). The world, as it is, will never see eye to eye with God, and they never will (1 Corinthians 1:20-31; 3:19).

You might be surprised to learn, though, that some professing believers do not think much more of you than these philosophers! A recent sad event involving a formerly-sound brother in Christ exemplifies the attitude of some who believe we should alter the doctrine of Jesus Christ to appease the denominations; during the course of events that led to his abandonment of the truth, he and his cohorts accused any who stand for truth as those unwilling to think, who blindly followed "tradition," and who are incapable of reading God's word, weighing it against other passages, and coming to a sound, reasoned conclusion without the help of someone else. Some have plainly stated that anyone who believes and teaches something that happens to agree with the conclusions of many men who have preceded them is guilty of teaching

"tradition" rather than Scripture - accusations that are more insinuation than actual facts.

The attempts are but mere smoke and mirrors and the old "dog and pony show" that is thrown up to deflect criticism of what they are actually teaching. No character assassinations are needed to "ruin" them; they are committing spiritual suicide when they purposefully leave behind the principles and commands of our Lord for a false hope of some other doctrines our Lord did not teach. May God be merciful enough to allow them time to come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil before it is too late.

Contained within several of these men's accusations is the charge that "we" [those in the church] are not thinking, but merely following someone else who did the thinking for us. The attempt is to paint the picture of what we follow as "traditions of men" unworthy of belief and, once successful in that, they then try to convince us that they are the only ones who have really been "thinking" and what they teach is a "new approach" to the Bible that is very much unlike what "we" are doing. [i.e., "My way is right and yours is wrong."] It seems much of their effort is made to convince us this is the case, because their writings sure are not convincing. A short read of some of these men's writings shows logical and scriptural errors galore, with quite a few assumptions, presumptions, and arrogance thrown in to top it off. I'd caution all to be very wary of any man who says everything you ever learned is wrong and, at the same time, argues that everything he says is right! One does not have to resort to derogatory insinuations about someone else's doctrine if he really has truth; truth is strong enough to stand on its own.

But let us not simply pass over these slanderous accusations of this supposed lack of thinking. Maybe you are not insulted by that, but I am and you should be!

First of all, I think it is a sad view of brethren to accuse the church, as a whole, of being unwilling and incapable of thinking on their own.

Second, I just do not believe it is true to say that everything we believe and teach is the doctrine and traditions of men; I daresay very little, if any, of what we do is "tradition" and much of what I do see as "traditional practices" fall in the realm of indifferent matters that I have never in my life heard brethren make out to be more than a local practice or just something that the brethren in one particular location do in a particular way. That fact is, the things these men are trying to label as "tradition" are really based on reasoned study, interpretation, and application of Scripture, and the only way they have around that is to slander and falsely accuse adherents of ignorance and arrogance. That method will forever be used by false teachers who have no leg on which their doctrines can stand.

But God does expect us to think. When Jesus commanded the apostles to go preach the gospel to every creature, He followed that up by saying, *"He who believes*

and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15-16). Jesus expected that those who heard the gospel could use their brains and weigh the evidence presented by the apostles and come to a logical and sound conclusion. He expected it, for He said we will be either saved or condemned based on our response to it! John wrote about the miracles of Jesus and plainly stated that it was enough evidence to convince us Jesus was the Christ (John 20:30, 31); friends and brethren, it takes some thinking to read those things and come to that conclusion, but it can be done! God is not so harsh that He would give us incomprehensible words and then demand that we use our brains to figure out what could not be solved or understood. God expects us to think!

God also tells us, "*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world"* (1 John 4:1). God expects us to not blindly accept and believe everything that comes along, but that we should "*test*" the spirits of men to see whether they are of God or of the world. Jesus said earlier, "*Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them"* (Matthew 7:15-20). Is it coincidental that the very next thing Jesus says is, "*Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven"* (Matthew 7:21)? I think not!

You see, Jesus expects us to be able to look at what a man is doing and what he is teaching and make a sound and reasonable judgment as to whether it is of God or not. Jesus expects that we will be able to tell the difference between truth and error and we will be judged for having done [or not done] just that. But how will we be able to judge rightly? Will it always be clear and evident? No, sadly, many times it will not be so easy to distinguish between truth and error, but not because we cannot know and understand truth! Oftentimes, it is our own lack of desire to know the truth that stands in the way of understanding spiritual truths. Sometimes we get mentally lazy and do not study to comprehend or for the purpose of personal application. It is then that we place ourselves in grave danger of being led astray, but it does not have to be so. It should not be so, for God expects us to think, to reason, and to understand.

It is a sad fact that some men have forgotten the standard by which truth and error will be judged, though. Some, seeking to promote themselves or their false doctrines, have sought out "new" ways of looking at the Scripture [new interpretations and new applications], and some have plainly abandoned the Scriptures altogether.

I urge you to stick with the word of God, friends and brethren, because it is there that you will find truth and salvation. Hide it in your heart [your mind], study it, live it, apply it, and teach it boldly.

Social Compatibility or Scriptural Compatibility

By Warren E. Berkley

Many who read this article will immediately know about what I'm going to describe. You are members of a small congregation somewhere in the United States. Due to the economics and mobility of urban life and suburban careers, your membership has dwindled and the budget is strained. Yet, you still do everything you are able to do to provide edification for all the members and teaching arrangements in keeping with the needs of families.

From time to time a young family will visit. You give them an encouraging welcome and you are delighted in the prospect of their permanent presence and work. Then, after a few visits you see them no more. When you call them or see them later - their explanation is given with some apology: "We were looking for a congregation with more people our age, and with children the same age as ours. Sorry."

Personally, I am not inclined to spend much time chasing after these folks. I can explain what my convictions are, try to teach them what is valuable, and answer questions about our work as a congregation. But I cannot provide what they are asking for. When these folks want children the same age as their children - how can we respond to that need on demand? We cannot go out and quickly recruit young families and kids to satisfy this perceived need. When they express their desire for more couples in their own generation - we cannot answer that need on demand. Local churches - according to the Bible - are not in the business of providing prospective members with their preferences, favorable circumstances and social compatibility! This is not our work. So I refuse to chase after folks who make such demands. Once they express their dissatisfaction with the make-up of congregation, there is little point in chasing them.

And though my opinion is not always well received, I have said this: *If all the young families and couples expressing these desires HAD STAYED HERE, we would now have the compatibility they demand!* So far I've not seen much patience in waiting for other couples and families or numerical growth through aggressive evangelism. So they come and go; and actually contribute to the problem they complain about.

It will be argued that people have a right to their personal preferences where no violation of scripture is committed. Certainly there are choices people can make about which local church to be a part of which fall in the realm of judgment and no sin is involved. And it would be reactionary and presumptuous to argue that everybody who doesn't place membership "with us" is guilty of sin and participating in error.

I would simply like to raise some questions about the typical choice many young couples make away from the smaller churches with fewer or no children.

Consider:

1. Local churches accused of not "providing" this compatibility will never be able to do so, as long as young people visit a couple of times and leave. It becomes a repeated cycle - *we don't have kids so we can't get kids because we don't have them!* Nobody seems to be willing to stay around long enough to break the cycle. Churches are being asked to provide a social need.

2. There are things which in God's sight take priority over our personal convenience and comfort. When we search for favorable personal circumstances above conviction and conscience, we do our families and children no favor. We all know that some of these couples and families reject good, sound churches and join the larger, more socially compatible liberal churches in spite of the unscriptural work involved. These are "mainstream" churches with programs of work which are attractive and emotionally exciting, but without scriptural substance! This is the real tragedy. This goes beyond poor judgment. This is wrong. (Acts 2:42; Ephesians 5:11; 2 John 9).

3. Even if the church young parents migrate to is both large and scriptural in their work, shouldn't they consider the potential blessing involved in contributing to the smaller, struggling local work; there is something positive to be said about going and staying where you are needed. (Phil. 1:12). How did large churches (with all the kids you want, in the right sizes and ages) come into existence? Most started as small works, without the social compatibility many demand. People made sacrifices to help build up and maintain small congregations! That's commendable.

4. Instead of seeing a large, socially compatible church as reliable for saving the children, perhaps the parents need to take on more of that duty. {And incidentally, there are many grown Christians today who are faithful, mature and active - elders, preachers and godly women - who grew up in small churches without many peers. It can be done.} Read through the New Testament, and write down every passage that places responsibility to nurture children. How many passages assign that duty to local churches? Families need to take up the work of evangelism to bring other young families in. Families need to get together and make good provision for the social needs of their children. Families need to avoid the habit of expecting schools, day care centers and churches to raise their children.

What is really obnoxious and arrogant is the impulsive comment that "so-in-so church is like a little nursing home; filled with hearing aids, walkers and grey hair." I pray to God that we might see the value and beauty of an elderly couple coming to the church building with their Bibles to worship God! What a tremendous testimony and

great influence for young families. I don't care if the old brother has gravy on his shirt, or his wife walks with bent frame. It shouldn't matter to anybody that their hearing and memory is impaired. And when we quickly dismiss the role of these little congregations with their old folks - we are forgetting their history of battles fought and work done; we are omitting their present influence and value, and showing our own ignorance and immaturity (Psalms 71:9). So the question to focus on is . . .

What should matter? One thing: Are these people devoted to doing what the Bible says, in everything they believe, teach and practice? It may be convenient and comfortable, but it is not necessary to have so many people your age in a local church in order to worship God and do what's right! It might be easier if there are children the same age as your children. It might be advantageous to have a Bible class arrangement that is exactly in harmony with your preferences and learning style. In fact, wouldn't it be pleasant to find a congregation where every detail of the work (building design, number and age of people, Bible class topics, location, etc.) is perfectly in keeping with just exactly what you want. All of this would be no pledge of edification and soundness. Why not focus on one thing? Are these people doing the work of the Lord, preaching the gospel and organized according to New Testament teaching? Regardless of their size, age make-up, and all the other things I would prefer - *Are these God's people who are doing His work? Are they continuing steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine?*

How refreshing it would be for a young couple to come into a small church composed mostly of older folks with this attitude: "We are not here to check on your age or find people socially compatible. It is not essential that you provide children the same age as our children. We are here to join with you in doing the Lord's work. We want the influence of your maturity, and we offer the energy of our youth. Even if the church a few blocks away has 200 people and children the same age as ours, they are not committed to New Testament authority and we will not join them just to meet our social needs. We are here to join you in doing what we believe is good and right before God. We are glad you are here, and we are ready to go to work!"

May God help such upright people find their way to the "smaller" and "older" congregations.

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