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Why Is It Different Now?

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I submit the following quotation for your careful consideration: "It is most likely that in the Apostolic age when there was but 'one Lord, one faith, and one baptism,' and no differing denominations existed, the baptism of a convert by that very act constituted him a member of the church, and at once endowed him with all the rights and privileges of full membership. In that sense, 'baptism was the door into the church.' Now, it is different, and while the churches are desirous of receiving members, they are wary and cautious that they do not receive unworthy persons. The churches therefore have candidates come before them, make their statement, give their 'experience,' and then their reception is decided by a vote of the members. And while they cannot become members without baptism, yet it is the vote of the body which admits them to its fellowship on receiving baptism." (The Standard Manual For Baptist Churches, Edward T. Hiscox, pg. 22).

Please note that Mr. Hiscox confidently affirms there was "one Lord, one faith, and one baptism" in the Apostolic age. No doubt, he was able to make this assessment because of the plain teaching of Ephesians 4:4-6. This scripture teaches the unity of all believers which God demands. A unity under submission to the authority of "one Lord" (Matt. 28:18; Lk. 6:46), thus having "one faith" rather than many and "one baptism" for penitent believers in order that their sins be forgiven (Acts 2:38), and at which point God adds them to his church (Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 12:13).

Mr. Hiscox further acknowledges that "no differing denominations existed" in the days of Christ's apostles, which is also taught in Ephesians 4:4-6 when it says there is "one body." However, Mr. Hiscox says, "Now, it is different." To this, we ask why, and has God said it was different? Has God changed his mind to keep up with the times? No doubt, the present state of religion, including the denomination Mr. Hiscox is affiliated with, is different from what is revealed in the New Testament, but are these changes justified? What has happened to bring them about? If religion must be different now, from that which we read about in the New Testament, one of two things must be true.

First, is it different now because the apostle's doctrine has become ineffective? An inspired apostle said that the gospel is God's power to save the sinner (Romans 1:16). Also, this same apostle said that it was God's wisdom that sinful man be saved by "the foolishness of the preaching" (1 Cor. 1:21). Another scripture affirms that those who "receive with meekness the implanted word" will save their souls (James 1:21). If God's word had such saving power in the apostolic age, what has changed now? God says that "4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." — Ephesians 4:4-6 His word is all-sufficient to what He has given it for: "so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Isa. 55:11).

"Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). If God has affirmed this power and sufficiency for His gospel, why would Mr. Hiscox believe it is different now?

Second, is it different now because somehow man is different now from the time of the apostles? No doubt, in some

ways man is different. He has advanced in knowledge and many advancements have been made indifferent areas of life. But has man ceased from being a sinner? God affirms in his scriptures that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Jesus came and died on the cross in order to save mankind of their sins (1 Pet. 1:18-20). Man's need for salvation in Christ will never change, whether he rides a chariot or a space shuttle. The gospel is relevant to all.

Actually, God's word answers our question as to why things in religion are different now? First, religion is different now because many have gone "beyond the things that are written" (1 Cor. 4:6), which is the very thing we are warned not to do. Conformity to the doctrine of Christ is essential to a pleasing relationship with God and Christ: "Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son" (2 John 9).

Second, religion is different now because of man's pride. Many, throughout time, have become dissatisfied with God's ways and substituted their own. Our Lord dealt with Pharisees who did "transgress the commandment of God because of your traditions" and were "teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men" (Matt. 15:3, 9). The apostles gave warning of man's presumption in religion. Paul said, "I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among, not sparing the flock; and from among you own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:29-30). Again, "For the time will come when they will not endure the sound doctrine, but having itching ears will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts, and will turn away their ears from the truth and turn aside unto fables" (2 Tim. 3:3-4). Man's pride to do things his way makes religion different today.

Third, religion is different today because of an emphasis on the carnal rather than the spiritual. The desire of many to be "entertained" has given modern religion a "carnival" atmosphere. The religious page each week of a local newspaper is mostly comprised of announcements for dinners and concerts sponsored by the differing denominations. This is an indicator of where the emphasis of modern religion lies and explains why things are different now.

In conclusion, having seen why things are different now, it should greatly disturb us and stir us to action. Pleasing God must be according to His terms, not ours. Therefore, break the shackles of human traditions/doctrines that have bound so many in denominationalism. Let us study the Bible for ourselves instead of heeding the word of those who say "now, it is different."

Rend Your Heart

- by Tim Johnson

"So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful" (Joel 2:13).

Rending one's garments was the action of one experiencing distress. Such actions, however, might be only superficial. According to Joel, that which really needed rending was the heart. One could tear his garments into shreds and still not be right with God.

The basic need is the recognition of the guilt of sin and godly sorrow from a broken heart. Because of sin in his own life, David knew the kind of heart that pleases God. After his sin with Bathsheba, he wrote, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart -- these, O God, You will not despise" (Ps. 51:17). In the 34th Psalm, he further showed the vital need of the broken heart: "The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit" (Ps. 34:18).

Paul knew that, where there was no sorrow for sin, there could be no forgiving of sin, "For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation" (2 Cor. 7:10).