

The Harvester

Preparing Souls

To Serve The Lord



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On These } Hang } Needless Two Laws } Much } Division

By Brian R. Kenyon

Several years ago I was asked to write an article on “anti-ism” for the appendix of a lectureship book. Basically, “anti-ism” (i.e., anti-Biblical expediency doctrine) may be defined as “binding what God has loosed” (cf. Mt. 16:19; 18:18; Gal. 2:4-5; 1 Tim. 4:1-5). Toward the end of that article I included a section that addressed “anti-ism” among churches considered “sound.” Along with the discussion of each example was a logical syllogism that showed binding opinions on those subjects was unscriptural. One of the examples was the local church’s use of organizations to assist in distributing benevolent aid.

The editor of the book called me to say he did not agree with that section. He did not at all address the syllogisms to prove they were unsound. He just did not like what I had to say. I had no problem with his deleting that section from the chapter, which he did. This incident, however, woke me up to the fact that some people simply do not want to rationally discuss matters of expediencies with which they disagree. I can only think of two main reasons why: (1) they are not interested in pursuing truth; or (2) they are more interested in agreeing with men, whether it be the “stalwarts” of the past or the present crowd with whom they want acceptance.

Recently, on social media, the issue of brethren, who would normally be considered “sound,” binding what God has loosed reared its ugly head again. In that discussion also was a refusal to rationally discuss the issue of expediency. From that attempt to rationally discuss the fundamental principles involved, I realized two man-made laws at the heart of the anti-Biblical expediency division, past

and present. On these two “laws” hang much unnecessary division.

First Law

“Only Those Things Explicitly Mentioned in the Bible Are Things That God Authorizes”

If this first law above were a true or false question, how would you answer? Would you even answer? Would you think it were a trick question? Look at it. Is not the answer obvious? What is it? Don’t be afraid to say it! Correct. The answer is false. There is no way a person can rationally maintain the answer is true. We recognize this every day. Local churches own buildings, use song books, write checks to pay bills, and a host of other things that are not explicitly mentioned in the Bible. Does this mean they are unauthorized? Of course not! They are authorized within the explicit obligations to assemble (Heb. 10:24-25), to sing in worship (Eph. 5:19), and to advance the Gospel (Mt. 28:19-20). Thus, the alleged authority-nailing question, “Where in the Bible did Paul or Peter use _____?” is not sufficient. Its underlying assumption is the false premise that “only those things explicitly mentioned in the Bible are things that God authorizes.”

Second Law

“All organized efforts of Christians that become incorporated to meet civil government requirements are sinful organizations”

If this second law above were a true or false question, the answer would be false. The term “organized efforts” refers to faithful brethren who are not members of the same local church of Christ who cooperate in fulfilling an obligation of which they are Scripturally capable (e.g., evangelizing). To illustrate, if three faithful Christian businessmen from different local churches of Christ met for the first time on an airplane going to the same convention, would they have a Scriptural right to cooperate with one another in evangelizing the hotel where they were staying? Obviously, the answer is yes (cf. Mt. 28:19-20; Mk. 16:15-16). Suppose they then decided to incorporate in order to take advantage of civil government’s tax breaks, etc.? Does that “organized effort” now become sinful merely because they become a corporation? The answer is no. If merely becoming a corporation makes an organization sinful, then most local churches of Christ in America are in sin because they are incorporated for tax exempt status and to meet other requirements of the state. Furthermore, to say that meeting civil government requirements makes something sinful is in direct violation of Romans 13:1-7 and First Peter 2:13-17, which teach that Christians, individually and/or collectively, are to obey civil laws that do not violate God’s law (cf. Acts 5:29).

Realities of These Laws

It is amazing that anyone truly interested in ascertaining truth would be afraid to answer “true” or “false” to the two simple statements making-up the first and second laws above. These statements isolate the principles involved in whether an organization has a Scrip-

tural right to exist! What is there to be fear? Exposing one’s own view as being founded on a false premise? Having to admit to oneself guilt in promoting needless division? People seeking truth must “man-up” and “Test all things; hold fast what is good” (1 Thes. 5:21).

Obviously, the correct answers to these two laws if put in the form of true or false questions, does not endorse every organization. However, the correct answers do prove that if an organization is sinful, it is not sinful merely because it lacks explicit mentioned in the Bible nor is it sinful merely because it is incorporated. If an organization is sinful, it will have to be shown sinful in some other area or areas.

Evaluating Organizations

Since the mere fact that an organization is not explicitly mentioned in the Bible or that it is incorporated as per civil law does not make it sinful, how then can it be determined whether an organization is authorized by God or is sinful? First, we must acknowledge the role of expediency. The basic meaning of expediency is that which gives advantage. The English word “expedient” is found seven times in the KJV Bible (Jn. 11:50; 16:7; 18:14; 1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23; 2 Cor. 8:10; 12:1). The Greek word *sumphero* (συμφέρω), from which “expedient” is translated, occurs in nine other places, where it is rendered “profit” (1 Cor. 7:35; 10:33; 12:7; Heb. 12:10), “profitable” (Mt. 5:29-30);

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Acts 20:20), “better” (Mt. 18:6), “is [not] good” (Mt. 19:10), and “brought ... together” (Acts 19:19). Of particular interest are two references in First Corinthians: “All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any” (1 Cor. 6:12), and “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not” (1 Cor. 10:23).

“Expedient” (from *sumphero*), which can also be translated “helpful” (NKJ) or “profitable” (NAS), means “to help, confer a benefit, be advantageous or profitable or useful ... something that is useful or helpful” (Bauer 780). It must be realized that no unlawful action can be done expediently (cf. Rom. 3:8), and that just because an action is lawful does not mean that it is always expedient.

Can a local church use an organization as an expedient to give that church advantage in carrying out an obligation? People who adhere to the two “laws” addressed at the beginning of this article would say it is Scriptural to use, for example, the United States Postal Service, in distributing evangelistic tracts or benevolent aid, but would protest if those same tracts or benevolent assistance was distributed by an organization operated by faithful brethren! They would cry out “human institution” or “missionary society” or “para church organization,” as if those terms prove that such organizations are unscriptural. Some uses of organizations are simply expedients.

Second, any organization can be Scripturally measured by the following component parts argument (which did not originate with this writer):

1. All total situations the component parts of which are Scriptural are total situations that are Scriptural.
2. The component parts of _____ organization are Scriptural.
3. Therefore, _____ organization is Scriptural.

Each organization stands or falls on the Scripturalness of its own component parts. This article is dealing with principles, not particular organizations. However, just plug into the argument any organization and analyze its component parts. We have already eliminated rendering an organization unscriptural just because it is not explicitly mentioned in the Bible or just because it is incorporated. If someone should disagree, then let him prove that only those things that are explicitly mentioned in the Bible are the things that God authorizes. Let him also prove that all organizations that are incorporated are organizations that are sinful. Again, there is no Biblical proof for those two “laws” mentioned earlier. Those who adhere to them not only act inconsistently, but even worse, they needlessly divide faithful brethren.

Possible Objections

Although correctly answering as true or false the two “laws” addressed in the beginning of this article and Scripturally analyzing an organization in the component parts argument should settle the matter, two of the more common objections need to be considered.

First, the comparison of all organizations other than the local church to the “missionary society” is totally unfounded. The missionary society of Alexander Campbell’s influence was sinful, not merely because it had no explicit mention in the Bible, but because it had a system of delegates who voted and dictated what local churches had to do in areas of evangelism (see Jackson). An organization that has this component is sinful, and thus cannot be used in fulfilling a God-authorized obligation (cf. Rom. 3:8).

Second, some object by saying, “Only the church is authorized to do the work of the church.” While this statement is true, there are two flaws in the way it is used by those who bind the “laws” mentioned earlier. First, they do not allow for God-authorized expediencies. The local church can use expedients to accomplish its God-authorized tasks (1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23). Second, they make an unwarranted distinction between the local church and the church universal. Three faithful brethren from different local churches evangelizing hotel guests is still the church (universal) doing the evangelizing. To bind that all evangelism must be done under the direct oversight of a local church would not only be binding what God has not bound, but would also put oneself in the ridiculous position of condemning as sinful such activities as men from different congregations together evangelizing hotel guests and impromptu Bible studies not at a church building.

Conclusion

It is just as sinful to bind what God has loosed as it is to loose what God has bound (Mt. 16:19; 18:18). Brethren who use man-made laws, such as the two addressed in the beginning of this article, as standards of fellowship are responsible for much unnecessary division. I recently heard a sermon in which the preacher asked how can conservative brethren be back in fellowship. The answer is simple: quit binding laws that God has not bound and accept matters of expediency as matters of expediency (1 Cor. 1:10).

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