

## Other Brethren

Some years ago, a young man in a bible study that I was attending, confessed to the group that for most of his earlier Christian life, he questioned whether anyone outside of the Baptist church could truly be a Christian. He had grown up attending his local Baptist Church, gave his life to Christ as a teenager and faithfully attended youth group activities.

He said that all he knew about the other denominations was what he heard from his youth leaders and his friends, and not much of that was good.

He confessed to us that he was delighted to witness the testimonies of each of us in the bible study group, and that it confirmed to him that yes, there were Christians outside of the Baptist Church.

I do fear that this young man's story is a common one. Members within their denominations, Presbyterian, Methodist, Church of God, Church of Christ, and on and on, often seem to question the salvation of members of other churches.

Because you and I are able to regularly observe the witness and the testimony and the behaviors of each other in this church we are confident that yes, we each are truly saved. But again, we sometimes have questions about those other folks out there in some of those other churches. We hear things about them and we wonder.

And as we'll read in our scripture passage here in Luke chapter 9, the same skepticism was found within the hearts of these intimate disciples of the Lord Jesus. But with just a few words, Jesus was able to give the simplest of answers to their lack of understanding. Listen and follow along as I read these words here in Luke chapter 9, beginning in verse 49.

<sup>49</sup> "Master," said John, "we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us." <sup>50</sup> "Do not stop him," Jesus said, "for whoever is not against you is for you." (Luke 9:49-50)

One of the delightful, but difficult truths that continually comes to me as I read and pray through the scriptures is that God's word will reveal to me many things about myself that would otherwise remain hidden.

As with these words in our scripture text for today, in studying them, I am convicted that although I openly voice how I believe that our God is mighty and powerful and far-reaching in His plans and purposes for us, within the privacy of my own mind, I fear that I actually take a much more narrow view of his providential involvement, especially as it would relate to matters of Christian belief. And I do fear that the same failure may be true within each of your minds.

In particular, though we might not say it openly, we believe in our heart that the specific doctrinal beliefs that we ourselves have come to accept and hold to are really the only real true and correct ones, and that everyone else really ought to believe as we do.

Most often, our beliefs are simply those that we grew up with, the doctrines preached in the church that our mother and our father took us to as children, the doctrines taught to us in our home or perhaps in a Sunday School class.

We are Baptists or Methodists or Presbyterian or Charismatic because our Mothers and our Fathers believed those doctrines. And because we trusted them for all the other matters of our daily lives, we also trusted them for our choice of churches and doctrinal beliefs.

With some of us who might not have had Christian parents to take us to church, our steps may have followed some other path. Perhaps it was when we got married, that our husband or our wife convinced us to attend their church, and we did. Or perhaps the community that we moved to with our new job only had one church near us and that was a Baptist Church, so we became Baptists.

Whatever the causes that brought us to where we are today, we believe what we believe and, very honestly, have become, to some degree, narrow-minded towards all those other denominations and their beliefs.

My own experiences with Christianity began when I was a small child. I was not a real believer in those days, and not really so until I was 29 years old. But along the way, I heard and experienced a variety of different beliefs and doctrines and theology.

As I've mentioned on other occasions, my dear mother attended Pentecostal churches. My uncle took us to his Baptist church. I finally received Christ as my

Savior and Lord in a Presbyterian Church. And each of those churches had, and preached, their very own special understanding of exactly what the words of these scriptures are telling us to believe.

And although I now have come to be settled upon some very specific doctrinal beliefs, many of the other teachings that I picked up along the way still remain with me and make up an important part of what I have come to accept in my own personal relationship with Christ.

The question being presented to us in these few words of exchange between Jesus and His disciples is, "Is there one, and only one, specific doctrine, one specific theology, one specific belief that is exactly right, and all the others wrong?"

The disciples seemed to believe so. And it prompted them to forbid a man, outside of their small group, to continue his ministry of casting out demons in Jesus' name.

And again, it seems that the same kind of response might sometimes take place with you and me as we view other Christians, not of our own fold.

The question again, "Is there one, and only one specific doctrine, one specific theology, one specific belief that is exactly right, and all the others wrong?"

Granted, our Christian beliefs must be based solely upon the truths given within this bible. But unfortunately, each of our minds seems to be able to read these truths and somehow come up with a slightly different interpretation of their meaning from what some other people might believe.

Again, the question, "Is there one, and only one specific doctrine, one specific theology, one specific belief that is exactly right, and all the others wrong?" "Is there one denomination that holds to and preaches the one and only perfect way of Christ, while all the others are confused or even wrong altogether?"

Or is it possible that the real truth of God is to be found in a mixture of the many doctrines and beliefs that make up the "real" church, a church that extends past the physical walls of buildings, and on past the denominational lines that separate us, into the invisible "universal" church, a church that resides within the hearts and souls of people who love and serve the person of Jesus Christ?

In our Apostle's Creed, we declare that we believe in such a church. We call it the "Holy Catholic Church". The word Catholic there, not meaning the Roman Catholic Church, but rather meaning the widespread "Universal" body of believers throughout the world who believe and hold to certain basic tenants of the gospel, irrespective of the denominational church they attend.

Though we do quote these words of the Apostle's Creed each Sunday morning, do we truly believe them? Listen carefully as I read them for us. And may I say again that these are basic biblical truths that are truly universal within the entire body of believers throughout the world. Listen!

I believe in God the Father almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth;  
And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord;  
who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, dead, and buried.  
He descended into hell.  
The third day he rose again from the dead.  
He ascended into heaven,  
and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father almighty.  
From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Ghost,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.

These are simple and basic truths that must be believed no matter what denominational church you attend.

And this is the essential message that Jesus was conveying to His disciples when John came to Him with these words,

"Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow with us."(Luke 9:49)

If this incident were to take place in one of our churches today, we might hear, "Pastor, we saw a man at the Baptist Church, or the Methodist Church or the Church of God who was preaching repentance and salvation, but we got up and left in the middle of his sermon because he is not Presbyterian like us."

Here in this passage, Jesus rebuked His disciples by saying,

<sup>50</sup> . . . "Do not forbid *him*, for he who is not against us is for us." (Luke 9:50)

A question . . . Does this rebuke from Jesus provoke you to consider such things in your own heart? Do you quietly, or even openly, reject some or all of the other denominational teachings and beliefs, just because those beliefs are not what you have been brought up to believe?

Now please understand, I don't mean to imply that we should put an automatic rubber stamp of approval on all of the things that take place within the beliefs and practices of all churches. Not at all! I know full well that some of the beliefs and practices taking place within even some of our "mainline" denominations are very wrong, actually coming straight out to the pit of hell.

But that will always be true of everything we encounter throughout this world. And that was also true in the days of Jesus. Jesus was not putting an automatic rubber stamp of approval on all of the things taking place in His day. He knew well that He lived within a crooked and perverse generation.

And you and I know that we also live within a crooked and perverse generation. And many of those crooked and perverse people attend and have some control over the beliefs and practices that take place within their churches. And even worse, that crookedness and perversity extends on out from those churches, infecting whole denominations.

But listen, that does not negate the truth that there are still many faithful believers worshiping and serving within those churches and within those denominations. And it also does not mean that just because those people are caught up in wrong practices that they are also unsaved.

And it does not mean that if saved people get caught up practicing wrong doctrines and beliefs, that they will somehow become "unsaved" because of it. That cannot happen.

Here in this passage, in addressing the harsh response of His disciples towards people outside of their specific group of believers, Jesus was telling them, as He is telling you and me now, that responses such as these are systematic of a much deeper problem within their hearts, the problem of sin, and specifically, the sin of “pride”, the very same sin that Jesus had only moments earlier rebuked them for as they disputed about which of them would be “greatest” when Jesus would come in His kingdom.

Listen again to these words and note how the disciple’s rejection of the man who was casting out demons is borne out of the very same sin as their prideful desire to be the greatest in God’s kingdom. Listen again to these words, beginning in verse 46,

<sup>46</sup> An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. <sup>47</sup> Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside him. <sup>48</sup> Then he said to them, “Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all—he is the greatest.” (Luke 9:46-48)

And then, the very next words,

<sup>49</sup> “Master,” said John, “we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us.”

<sup>50</sup> “Do not stop him,” Jesus said, “for whoever is not against you is for you.” (Luke 9:49-50)

Did they not listen, could they not hear His first words? No sooner had He rebuked them for the first matter of pride, than they stepped on forward with a second sinful pretense.

With their response, the disciples revealed that they had a high opinion of themselves and of their newfound beliefs. And their words also revealed that they still had a very limited understanding of the real mission that Jesus was calling them to carry forward.

They were not yet able to grasp the concept that as other ordinary men would be brought to salvation, then those new believers would, in turn, themselves go on out and preach and teach the gospel.

These disciples did not seem to understand that the very man that they were rejecting was probably one whom Jesus or even one of them might have preached to earlier on one of their mission trips. And now, in response to his salvation, the man was answering the special call from God to “go ye into all the world and preach the gospel”.

These disciples would later on themselves go out into all the world and each of them would do as this stranger was doing. They would carry forward the gospel that Jesus began, but for the moment, they were still weak in their faith, narrow-minded, and in serious need of a Spirit-filled examination of their own prideful souls.

And I do believe the same is true for you and me. Again, the reason that God puts these scriptures in front of us is to allow the Holy Spirit the opportunity to reach in and to examine our souls. And we need to let Him do that, because just as it was with these confused disciples, you and I can let pride seep into our own beliefs.

So then, Jesus' response here to His disciples is also a response to you and me about our own beliefs. He is telling you and me that yes, there truly are other believers besides us, spread throughout other churches. And just because they believe some things differently from us does not make them unsaved or unworthy of God's blessings.

Again, please do understand, These words do not imply that we should put an automatic rubber stamp of approval on all of the things that take place within the beliefs and practices of all churches. Not at all! As I said a moment ago, some of the beliefs and practices taking place within even some of the most popular of our “mainline” denominations are very wrong, actually coming straight out to the pit of hell.

But these words do imply that God's people, whether they be Charismatic, Methodist, Baptist, or in one of the many other denominational church groups, if they believe, and they confess and they hold to the basic truths of the gospel, are probably acceptable in God's sight, and should be in ours also.

And God is clear in His definition of who is acceptable in His sight. And He gives us that definition in Romans chapter 10. There He tells us . . .

<sup>9</sup> . . . if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. (Romans 10:9-10)

God really does have a “holy, universal, invisible church” and it is widespread and it is carrying forth His gospel to every nation. You and I must surrender up our pride each day and commit ourselves to accepting all of the many other brothers and sisters that Christ has invited into His service throughout the world.

And as Jesus reminded us here in these words, “he who is not against us is for us”, then the exact same should be able to be said of us about those other believers in other churches. We must not be “against them, but for them”.

Praise be to God. And listen as we close.

<sup>49</sup> Now John answered and said, “Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow with us.”

<sup>50</sup> But Jesus said to him, “Do not forbid *him*, for he who is not against us is for us.”

Let's pray.