

These Things Concern Me

By Bob Young

I struggled with a title for this reflection. Some of the possibilities that crossed my mind included, "Barriers to Effective Work for the Lord," "These things ought not so to be," "Things we do not need," and "Things inconsistent with New Testament faith."

Regardless of the title, the things below I have observed over the past several years as I have increased my involvement in mission work. **These things concern me.**

Man-made doctrinal statements or "confessions of faith" with precedence over the Bible

"You cannot speak or be involved in 'our' ministry unless you affirm or sign this statement."

Humanly devised doctrinal statements as conditions of acceptance (or rejection) are unnecessary and ought not to exist. We do not need "confessions of faith" that must be signed as a condition of being accepted or approved within the body of Christ. Regardless of our good intentions, do not such statements covertly claim infallibility on the part of the one writing the statement?

Why is the Bible not sufficient? Why do we want to substitute a humanly devised creed for the Bible? I appreciate the value of summaries and teaching tools, but such ought not to be placed above Scripture and used as a condition of acceptance.

I am willing to affirm that I will follow the authoritative, inspired word of God. Should that not be sufficient (and even better than any doctrinal statement a human being might devise) if we are genuinely interested in understanding, restoring, and applying the Christian faith described in the New Testament?

Extending or denying fellowship on the basis of human doctrinal statements or summaries

"You cannot be in fellowship with us unless you sign this statement."

Lines are drawn based on faith confessions and human documents. Human reason stands above Scripture. Why is the Bible not sufficient? Why would we draw lines of fellowship and distinction based on anything other than the clear teaching of Scripture? Do we ever draw lines of fellowship in matters that are peripheral, such as those described in Romans 14-15?

Choosing Sides: Extending or denying fellowship on the basis of Christian connections

"You cannot be in fellowship with us unless you refuse to have anything to do with the other side." "You are suspect because you communicate with a certain person." "We consider you unfaithful if you have anything to do with the other side."

Why do we continue in a divisive practice (choosing sides) rather than seeking unity? Why do we seek to divide? Why must I be loyal to one side or another rather than to God? Why must I choose sides? Why cannot my loyalty to God and his Word be sufficient? Why cannot I seek to maintain communication and a level of fellowship with all who are part of the body of Christ?

Exclusivity: Extending or denying fellowship based on whether someone will affirm one position or side to the exclusion of any alternate view

"You cannot be in fellowship with us unless you affirm only 'our side.'" "Not only will we not accept you if do not affirm our side, we will mark you because you put following only the Bible above our doctrinal understanding."

Why must we be excluded because we will not take a certain side? Why must we be marked because we place the Word of God in the highest position and seek to avoid being drawn into division? Does something seem strange when those who seek to follow only the Bible as supreme spiritual authority are being marked?

Basing financial considerations on the items addressed in this reflection

"We will pay you to take our side."

Loyalty to God and Scripture and fellowship in the body of Christ should not be for sale. The challenge certainly touches those who would base their doctrinal position or fellowship on financial considerations. It also touches those who would take advantage of the impoverished financial condition of many nationals in the mission field by basing the giving or withholding of financial support on anything other than loyalty to God and His Word.

These things concern me because they are divisive.

- The existence of and use of official doctrinal statements, and that that such statements are placed above the Bible
- That such statements are used as the basis of acceptance or rejection rather than the Bible
- That judgment about a brother is based on who he communicates with
- That fellowship is extended or denied based on choosing sides
- That money is used as an instrument to encourage choosing sides