

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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Application Matters

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A missionary, Mr. Cram, addressed the Senecas at Buffalo Creek in New York in 1805. In the presence of the agent of the United States for Indian Affairs, Mr. Cram said the following to the principal chiefs of the six nations:

“I am come, brethren, to enlighten your minds, and to instruct you how to worship the Great Spirit agreeably to his will, and to preach to you the gospel of his Son, Jesus Christ. There is but one way to serve God, and if you do not embrace the right way, you cannot be happy hereafter.”

The chiefs replied: “Brother, we understand your religion is written in one book. You say that there is but one way to worship and serve the Great Spirit. If there be but one religion, why do your people differ so much about it? Why not all agree, as you can all read the book? Brother, we do not understand these things. We are told your religion was given to your forefathers. We also have a religion which was given to our forefathers. It teaches us to be thankful for all the favors we receive, to love one another, and to be united. We never quarrel about religion. We are told you have been preaching to the white people in this place. Those people are our neighbors: we are

acquainted with them. We will wait a little, to see what effect your preaching has upon them. If we find it does them good, makes them honest and less disposed to cheat Indians, we will then consider again what you have said.” (*The Religious Denominations in the United States; pub. Charles DeSilver, Savannah, Georgia, 1861*).

The first observation of the chiefs is that followers of the gospel of Christ have “one book.” Why then do we not have unity? One book should not produce contradictory beliefs and practices. We might add that we not only have one Book but the one Book claims to present “one faith,” not many (*Ephesians 4:5*).

The problem is not with the one book, but with the so-called believers who do not remain in that which is written. Paul saw this as a cause for the division in Corinth: “...that in us ye might learn not to go beyond that which is written: that no one be puffed up for the one against another” (*I Corinthians 4:6*). Proudful arrogance causes strife between two people who do not remain in what has been written but promote their own reasoning and wisdom. Not remaining in what is written can be illustrated by

considering the mode of baptism. The Greek word “baptisma” means “immersion” (bapto-to dip) when originally written. Yet, men come along and make “sprinkling” as a mode for baptism. Not remaining in what is written, men create unnecessary division. Elders, bishops, and shepherds (pastors) are all the same group of men with distinctive qualifications overseeing a local church in the writings of the “one Book” (*cf. Acts 20:17, 28; I Timothy 3; Titus 1*). Religious leaders distinguish between “bishops” and “elders” in Catholicism, and the preacher in Denominationalism oversees as the “pastor” blurring the divine lines laid down by God for the distinctive roles of “evangelists,” and “elders.” Again, going beyond what is written creates this organizational division, contradicting God’s pattern.

The chiefs demanded another condition. Let us see how it changes others for the better before we consider it for ourselves is a popular reality among many. Jesus’ followers must avoid being a stumbling block before others (*cf. Matthew 13:41-42, Philippians 2:13-16*). The unbeliever needs to see the application of the Word in all facets of our lives, including our marriages “that the word be not blasphemed” (*Titus 2:5*). How we apply the one Book matters!