

“FARMING PROBLEMS”

You know, the devil must rejoice, and the skeptic certainly delights in the divided state of religion today. Numerous denominations exist, and countless divisions within those denominations. Surely this isn't God's will, and it's not what Jesus built more than 1900 years ago when He said, "I will build My church." What we have is a farming problem.

Some months ago, a friend of mine and fellow gospel preacher held a gospel meeting for my home congregation. He presented a lesson entitled, "Farming Problems," and he presented this thought-provoking illustration that I want to share with you.

Suppose you had five farmers living in a community, and all five got ready to go out and plant a crop of wheat at the same time. They all go down to the local co-op and purchase the seed for planting. They all intend to purchase the very best seed they can buy, and they all plan to raise the same crop. The seed is purchased, the ground is plowed, the crops are sown, the months pass by, and the same sun shines on all five fields. The same rains fall on them, they endure the same temperatures and the same weather conditions. Then comes the harvest. These same five farmers gather their crops and bring them for sale. Let's suppose that one of the farmers had a truckload of wheat—beautiful golden heads of wheat. Then, behind him comes the next farmer and, strangely enough, he has a load of corn. Along comes the third farmer and he has yielded a great crop of soybeans. After him comes the fourth farmer with a bumper crop of peanuts. Finally, the fifth farmer comes along with a plentiful harvest of potatoes.

Obviously, we have encountered some farming problems. I mean, how could five farmers obtain the same seed, from the same place, and bring back five totally different types of crops? Well, we'd have to conclude one of the following things:

*You are dealing with ignorant farmers, who didn't know what wheat seed looks like, and they didn't care to check that what they were getting was wheat. OR...

*They might have received impure seed. Some other kind of seed was mixed in with it or the supplier substituted a different kind of seed. OR...

*Perhaps the field was not adequately prepared, so the past seed choked out the new. OR...

*You are dealing with dishonest farmers, who claim to plant wheat, but instead, for whatever reason, planted something else.

Did you know that the word of God is called a seed? It is. It's called, "the seed of the kingdom." When Jesus preached the parable of the sower in Luke 8, He likened the preaching of the truth to a farmer planting seed in a field. You'll recall that the seed fell on different kinds of soil, and depending on the condition of the soil, it either yielded fruit or it didn't. Now, it didn't yield different *kinds* of fruit because it was one farmer planting one kind of seed. It simply either brought forth fruit, or the crop failed. Those are the two choices.

Luke 8:11 “Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.”

Jesus goes on to explain that the soil represents the human heart. The same laws of nature that tell us that every seed will bring forth after its own kind, apply spiritually as well. The seed of the kingdom will produce one thing and one thing only, if it produces anything at all, and that one thing is a Christian. So, maybe when we see Christendom in a state of chaos and rank division, perhaps we have a farming problem. We either have farmers who are ignorant about the seed being planted, or we have impure seed that is mixed with or replaced by something else that’s being planted, or we have an unprepared heart where the tares of error have not been removed and have sprung back up and taken over the wheat, or we have dishonest farmers—preachers who are disingenuously leading people astray while claiming to preach the word of God, but instead are preaching something besides or in addition to the word of God.

Some of the most basic and immutable laws of nature are the laws of seedtime and harvest. All life on earth is based on the simple principle that God decreed in the beginning, that every living thing would have a way of reproducing itself, and that is by the seed placed within it.

Genesis 1:11 “And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so.”

Genesis 1:24 “And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so.”

We continue to see that principle in all life on earth. That is one of the glaring problems with the Darwinian Theory of Molecules to Man Evolution. While species can adapt within themselves over time for the sake of their survival, they still belong to their own kind. In other words, dogs don’t change into cats, birds don’t become fish and pigs don’t mate with cows and produce another kind. Every living thing belongs to its own kind and reproduces its own kind.

Here’s something else: when God created the world, He did so through miracle. It began by miracle. But God at that time, set into motion immutable laws of nature that allow things to continue. In other words, the first life was created by God, by miracle, full-grown with the appearance of age, but each was created with the seed of reproduction to bring forth after its own kind. Consequently, today a pair of monkeys may leave Africa and be taken to Australia, and they can mate and produce another monkey. But it won’t be a kangaroo. You can go out in a field and plant corn, and that cornstalk will produce a seed. You can take that seed, preserve it and wait a long time, maybe even carry it around the world and plant it, and if it grows, there is one thing you know. You can mark it down, it will produce more corn. It’s not going to produce peas or butter beans.

Well, the same is true concerning New Testament Christianity, and the church that you read about in the New Testament. Think about it this way: it was created and revealed by miracle (**Acts 2**), but God placed within it the seed of reproduction, which Jesus identified in **Luke 8** as “the word of God.” Since that time, more than 1980 years ago, when that word is planted yet today in the ready heart of a person, it will produce one thing and one thing only: a New Testament Christian, just like you read about in the

book of Acts. And, that person will be a member of that very same church that you read about in the book of Acts. You see, the word of God will make Christians and Christians only. Just like the five farmers that we talked about earlier, if you see more than one *kind* of Christian, or you see different *kinds* of fruit, then somewhere along the way, there have been some farming difficulties. Let's see if we can look at the realm of modern, fragmented, broken religion and identify what the trouble might be.

Let's start in **Acts 2**. On the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter and the beginning nucleus of the Lord's newly established church was filled with the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit of God led them and empowered them. (There is the beginning by miracle, like we mentioned earlier.) When Peter preached that day, he did so by the inspiration and in demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit. Thousands of people were gathered there, and they saw what happened that day. A great multitude heard Peter preach that Jesus, whom they had crucified just days before, was indeed Lord and Christ.

Acts 2:37-38 "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

Acts 2:41-42 "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."

So, these people heard the gospel preached for the first time, they wanted to obey it and be saved, Peter told them to repent and be baptized for the remission or forgiveness of their sins. Luke says they gladly received his words and were baptized and three thousand were added to the number of disciples, and they continued on in corporate worship and in living the Christian life.

Acts 2:47 "...And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."

Now let's think about that. Let me ask you a question and I want you to sincerely think about this: When those people on the Day of Pentecost believed what they believed and did what they did, what were they? What did they become? Were they Catholics? No, because the catholic church with its hierarchy of priests, bishops, archbishops, cardinals and popes did not evolve for several hundred years from this time. Were they Protestants? No, that couldn't be, because the protestant movement was born in protest of the doctrines and perceived corruptions of Catholicism. That was nearly 1500 years away from the time that Luke wrote Acts 2. Were these people Lutherans? Well, no, they couldn't have been Lutherans because Martin Luther didn't nail his 95 objections to the door of the Catholic church in Wittenburg, Germany until October 31, 1519. So it was just under 1500 years too soon for them to be Lutherans. Were they Presbyterians? No, they couldn't have been Presbyterians because it wasn't until 1539 that John Calvin began preaching about God's sovereignty and others developed the five points of doctrine that was born of Calvin's theology, The Five Points of Calvinism. Were these people Baptists? Well, they were baptized, but these people were told to be baptized *for the remission of sins* (Look closely at verse 38). Baptists don't baptize for the remission of sins, and if you don't believe that, just walk up and ask the Baptist preacher if baptism is for the remission of sins and see what he tells you.

Besides all of that, they couldn't have been Baptists because John Smith didn't baptize himself and organize a group of people to worship with him until 1607. They weren't Methodists because John Wesley didn't break away from the Church of England and a group was not formed calling themselves Methodists until the end of the 18th century. And on and on and on we could go...That still leaves us with the question, what were these people in Acts 2?

Acts 11:26 "...And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch."

What made them Christians? The fact that they simply followed the teachings of the Lord Jesus in faith. They obeyed the gospel preached by the apostles by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and the faith that existed in the first disciples was then again born in the hearts of those who heard the word, believed it and submitted to it. That's how the seed principle works, you see.

Now, those early disciples had a creed that they went by, but that creed was not what you might be thinking. Their creed was simply the word of God, nothing more and nothing less.

I Peter 4:11 "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God."

You see, if the same word that they believed and obeyed 2000 years ago is believed and obeyed today, then you'll have the same thing that you had 2000 years ago, nothing more and nothing less. Simply, a Christian.

So, why so many churches? How has religion in the name of Christ become fragmented and denominated? Today, we are living in the era when postmodernism rules the thinking of people, and unfortunately, the Bible hardly even enters the discussion. People just do what feels good and right to them, and truth, if it even really exists, isn't all that important to people.

You see, when the protestant reformation began, the Catholic church dominated the world and it was governed by the dictates of the pope and the church hierarchy. It functioned under the authority of the catechism. Well, some noble, brilliant, well-meaning men saw the error in all of that, and they broke away, and the protestant reformation was born. These men studied their way out of the blindness of the dark ages, but unfortunately, they and/or their followers began to draw up their own peculiar creeds that distinguished and delineated them one from another. Here's a visual that might be helpful:

THE BIBLE AND HUMAN CREEDS

Bible + Catechism = Catholic

Bible + Discipline = Methodist

Bible + Westminster Confession of Faith = Presbyterian

Bible + Prayer Book = Episcopalian

Bible + Second London (later Philadelphia) Confession of Faith = Baptist

Bible + Book of Mormon = Latter Day Saint

Well, on and on we could go. But do you see the problem with what came out of the reformation, as opposed to the *restoration*? Jesus said that the seed of the kingdom is the word of God. That's largely how we get five farmers all claiming to plant the same seed, yet producing five completely different things, per our illustration in the beginning. Either they're not planting the pure seed of God's word, or they're mixing it with something else—maybe the Westminster Confession of Faith or the Discipline or the Baptist Faith and Message or the Philadelphia Confession of Faith. Friend, we can never have the unity that Jesus decreed and prayed for under those conditions.

I Corinthians 1:10 “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you: but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”

John 17:20-21 “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou has sent me.”

Jesus answers the question as to why there is so much skepticism in the world today, because we are far from being one, as Jesus prayed. We are divided by creeds and catechism and disciplines and various other dogmas. The sectarian preachers may say that their creeds are necessary to unite upon, or create cohesiveness, and simply state what's in the Bible. Well, think about it: if they're only stating what's in the Bible, if that's all a creed does is state what's in the Bible, then why do you need a creed? Why not throw them away and just use the Bible? It's really not complicated. Let's just suppose for a moment that the Catholic throws away his catechism and the Methodist throws away his discipline. The Presbyterian throws away his Westminster Confession and the Baptist throws aside his Baptist Faith and Message or the Philadelphia Confession of Faith. You know, if we ALL did that and agreed that the Bible is the inspired word of God, and that it is therefore our only rule of faith and practice, where it speaks we speak, where it is silent we are silent, wouldn't we be more on the pathway to unity for which Jesus prayed? Plant the seed of the kingdom in the hearts of men and only the seed of the kingdom in the hearts of men, and Christians after the very fashion of those we read about in the New Testament will be the only result.

What if we all resolve to answer the question, “What must I do to be saved?” That's a perfectly scriptural question, by the way (**Acts 2, Acts 16**). What if we resolve to answer that question with nothing but a Bible answer? You see, that's the problem. A creed teaches people that all they must do to be saved is to receive Jesus and say a prayer inviting Him into their heart. Folks, that may be what their creed says, but that's not what the seed says (see **Acts 2:37-38** above). Peter answered their question, “What must I do to be saved?” They did what he said, repenting and being baptized for the remission of their sins, and the Lord added them to His church. Do you know that that can be duplicated today and have the very same result, without the interference of creeds, catechisms, disciplines and so forth?

But then you have another denomination that comes along and says that according to their creeds and bylaws, you have to be voted in after you're saved. My friend, there is not one single passage in your

Bible that says any such thing! The Lord does the adding—not men (see **Acts 2:47** above). He adds a person to *His church* not when he submits to the Philadelphia Confession of Faith, the Discipline or any other creed or set of bylaws. He does it when he submits to the Lord Jesus Christ and receives the remission of sins (see **Acts 2:41,47** above).

The Lord has a sobering warning for us:

Matthew 15:9 “But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”

Matthew 15:13 “But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.”

II John 1:9 “Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God.”

I want to tell you something that is great news and is wonderfully refreshing! You can be a Christian, and a Christian only! You can make your plea the simple restoration of New Testament Christianity in your own heart and life, and in the lives of others. You may be a member of a denomination, but I hope that you’ll give some serious thought to how that denomination came to be, and what makes it a denomination. You can throw aside those creeds and dogmas and simply take the word of God as your rule of faith and practice, and that means answering Bible questions with Bible answers. That means looking to see what Jesus and His apostles said about a matter instead of what Dr. Somebody says about a matter. When you turn to the word of God for the answers, you’re going to find that it makes things a whole lot simpler.

People have tried all kinds of things to cure the malady of division in religion today. I can tell you that postmodernism is NOT the answer. The idea that there is no such thing as truth, truth doesn’t matter, truth is whatever you think it is in your own mind and that’s irrelevant to somebody else...Folks, that philosophy has our world so mixed up that we don’t know up from down today. Just look at our culture! A new denomination is not the answer. That only compounds the problem. Ecumenicalism is not the answer because truth comes from God, and truth MATTERS. It matters what you believe. The answer is nothing more and nothing less than to return to the New Testament, and only believe, preach and practice those things that you can read therein. Would you resolve to do that today? It may mean that you need to be baptized for the remission of your sins because that’s not what you were taught before in a denomination. It may mean that you need to change your worship because you’re not currently worshipping in spirit and in truth (**John 4:24**). But if we would strike hands and hearts upon that noble resolve, a great revival and a great re-manifestation of pure, first-century Christianity would result. May God give us the hearts and the resolve to do so!