

2. 21st Century Issues

Many churches have begun practices that are new and different from the teaching of the New Testament. These practices are also new and different from those practices of the New Testament church. These practices are disturbing and disrupting to those of us who are applying New Testament teaching as the authority for our work and worship. The elders at Ephesus were told to guard the church in Acts 20:28: "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."

The innovations are usually additions to the New Testament pattern of worship or additions to the New Testament pattern for the fellowship of true believers. The innovations in worship usually involve those additions that make the worship more entertaining and enticing. It is sometimes called *praise worship*: hand clapping, choral singing, dramatic presentations, dancing, and even the use of instrumental music. The innovations to the principles of the fellowship of true believers are usually fellowship with denominations, participation in interdenominational services, and the belief that there are saved people in all groups that profess belief in Christ.

Innovations are perverse by their very nature. "The introduction of something new; a new idea, method, or device," states *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, Tenth Edition. Chasing after their denominational friends, innovators in the church say, "Where is the scripture that forbids it?" Or as I heard one preacher say in support of the instruments of music in the worship, "There are only two passages that command singing." Innovators follow such statements with appeals to the Old Testament or to the trumpets in heaven of *The Revelation*. The New Testament is clear in 1 Peter 4:11: "Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God." The seriousness of perverting these utterances of God is also made very clear in Gal 1: 6-8:

I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!

The utterances of God are not only certain but they are for all time. Jude writes in Jude 3: "Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints." We all should hold to the fundamental teaching of these passages. "If anything is new, it is not true; if anything is true it is not new," argued the restorers of New Testament Christianity in the 19th century.

All Christians of the 21st century should become familiar with the underlying issues that we have to face. The answers to the issue questions define that difference between the innovators and their innovative practices and New Testament Christians and their New Testament practices in work, worship, and fellowship. We will find scriptural answers to these questions:

- Is there a New Testament pattern?
- How do we establish this New Testament pattern?
- Are we bound to follow this New Testament pattern? And what if we do not?
- Does this New Testament pattern include worship?
- Does this New Testament pattern include the fellowship of true believers?
- Our congregations need to be prepared to defend the church of Christ against these innovations.