

## Introduction to the Religious Group Study By Mark T. Tonkery

We are about to begin a journey through church history and religious division. These two topics are very much connected together and must be considered as one study. I know that it must grieve God's heart to see the religious division that exists today. Religious division has been around a long time Acts 15 the issue over allowing Gentiles into the church, and the church was divided. In 1 Cor. 1:11-13, 3:2-7, and the 7 churches in Revelation we see more church division. Paul states in 1 Cor. 11:17-19, "But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized." I guess there may always be some sort of division, but we must be "aware of the genuine." We must be among the genuine, and not the ones who cause religious division. Gal. 5:19-20 teaches that those who cause divisions will not inherit the Kingdom of God. Tit 3:10 Paul tells to have nothing to do with divisive persons. Yet on the other hand being genuine believers of God who are united are blessed. Psalms 133:1, states, "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!" This is what Jesus prayed for in John 17:19-23, we can help answer Jesus' prayer by searching the scriptures and applying them to our life.

As we begin this study I would like to make a few comments about this study.

1. As we study this topic my goal is not to hurt anyone or judge anyone. I realize that in each assembly there are those who are visiting from other religious groups, those who have family in other religious groups, and those who have been converted out of other religions. Knowing this I want to be as kind as possible and I ask those in this Bible class to be kind as possible. I am not going to make fun of or ridicule someone else's belief. I ask that each in this class will not make fun of or ridicule others' beliefs. We need to be wise in our dealings with one another. I ask everyone to be kind in this discussion also because if people are here in Bible Study they have a chance to learn.
2. With that said there are going to be times when there will be things pointed out in scripture that will go against some of the various religious groups' beliefs. Again I will ask that we all be kind and wise in using the scriptures. Eph. 6:17 reminds us that the word of God is the sword of the Spirit and just like any sword it needs to be used wisely.
3. Scripture teaches us that when Paul and other teachers in the New Testament dealt with those who were religious and had not obeyed the gospel they used wisdom and kindness for example:
  - a. Cornelius in Acts 10:1-2 devout man and one who feared God. (Not a Christian but who needed to be taught the Death, Burial, and Resurrections of Christ and his response in baptism)
  - b. In Acts 13:6-12 two men one was a man of intelligence who wanted to hear the word of God and second one who was a magician, false

prophet who was preventing the message of Christ. Paul cause Bar-Jesus to be blind and the other believed.

- c. Paul in Athens Acts 17:16-34 talking to very religious people but pagan idol worshipers, he did not condone, or reticule their idols but used it as an illustration to teach the gospel and some believed (meaning converted), some wanted to hear more, and some sneered. We need to let others do the sneering and reticule not us.
- d. Apollos in Acts 18:24-28 was a bold and mighty in scriptures but needed to be taught more accurately.
- e. Some disciple of John Acts 19:1-5 needed to be taught and baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.
  - i. These illustrations from scripture I believe teach very clearly how we are to deal with our religious friends.
  - ii. First complement them or point out what they do right. (devout, fear God, intelligent, worship an unknown God, bold and mighty in scriptures).
  - iii. Second they dealt with the person not the religion of the person. They didn't say all Jews, those who worship the idol Artemis, Epicureans and Stoics are going to hell (At least not one their first few attempts). That might be implied but they preached the gospel of Christ and looked for ways to relate the message.
  - iv. Third, people who were searching need to see the Gospel preached and being lived in the one who were preaching and teaching. Many of these people that were mentioned in Acts are searching for the truth, imagine if Paul and the others refused to go and be uncomfortable for a moment as they taught in pagan assemblies, would the gospel have advanced as it did? Not likely.
  - v. Fourth, people are still seeking today. I want to use what they know about God, Christ, and the Bible to bring them to a better knowledge of the truth and I do not want to ridicule them or make fun of them and lose an opportunity of sharing the Gospel.
    1. As I have preached I know that their have been several that I have had close contact with three different families one in Cambridge, OH and two in South Point, OH. Three different stories where there was a member in the family who was studying the scriptures, they were part of a religious group studied their way out on their own. Each time they found a member of the church of Christ and asked them what they believed about the Gospel and how to be a Christian. In each case the church members point to the scriptures and they said that is not what my preacher teaches and after more study they obeyed the Gospel and went back and

taught their family the Gospel and they became active members of the church. These stories would have been different if the one who was teaching made fun of or ridiculed the student for their religious belief.

2. There once was a missionary who was invited to a preachers meeting to speak about his work in the Caribbean Islands. The missionary mentioned that he was studying with the Pentecostals and the Presbyterians. Some of the preachers ridiculed him for doing such. The missionary said that he would much rather preach and teach to these groups because they at least they had some kind of belief in God where as the original Islanders were pagan idol worshippers. It was easier to teach about baptism, worship, church organization and proper understand of miracles today than to deal with those who do not believe in God, and the Bible.
3. I agree with him I would rather teach someone about baptism than try to explain the existence of God. I am willing to do both, but one is easier than the other.
- vi. Fifth, I am not judging people's heart, I am just questioning doctrine. We need to separate the person from their religious group. I want all people to go to Heaven just as the Lord does in 1 Tim. 2:4. I rather take the time to be patience with someone than to rashly dismiss them and their religion. If we truly understood how horrible hell is we would do everything we could to help them get to Heaven. There is no room for ridicule or making fun of one another or being impatient with those who are in another religious group or who are not religious at all. We must use our words wisely and think before we talk.
4. I know that other religious groups are different and I know that sometimes people make fun of and ridicule when they do not understand why others do what they do. We are going to try to work through some of this as we study this series. I am going to do my best to not degrade and hurt others and I ask that each in this class will do the same as well. Above we must search the scriptures.
5. I have three purposes for this class:
  - a. First to provide information about the beliefs of various religious groups. Now it is true I do not know everything about these groups, some I am more familiar than others. Some I am more familiar with a certain sect of the group than others. There are many divisions in everyone of these religious groups we are studying, and I cannot cover every ounce of false teaching and their belief, especially in the time that is allotted. I ask your patience with this.

- b. Second I want to point to what the Bible states we should believe. Again I remind you of 1 Cor. 11:17-19, “But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized.”
- Where to Go:** In the midst of the religious confusion of our day, where can the really sincere and honest person go? Go to your Bible! Search the Scriptures! Find the church that is in the Bible! Forget about all the different things you have always heard about the church. Find out what the Bible says about it, and you will have the truth! Too many people are reading the latest popular respected theologian or listening to the “High Powered” evangelists that draw the crowds. You need to look for the church in the Bible and when you find it you can be sure you will find the Bible in the church!
- c. Third I want to try to help each one of us to better share the Gospel with those in other religious groups.