

Creating Our Own Confusion

Many gods under one name: They say a rose called by any other name is still a rose. So also, is anything else. It matters little what you call something, it is what it is. When the Apostle of Jesus Christ, Paul of Tarsus, was approaching the city of Athens, “his spirit was provoked within him as he beheld the city full of idols” (Acts 17:16). The city of Athens was noted for its idols. “This was a city that was entirely different from any that Paul had ever visited or was to visit. It is often described as a university town that was similar to those cities of our day that have great universities located in their midst; but this conception is misleading in more ways than one. It was the world center of art, but an art that was devoted chiefly to the idolatries of Greek mythology. Its great attraction today is the ruined Parthenon with the Erechtheion on the far left and two amphitheaters far below on the right. Sculpture, Greek architecture, Greek theaters, schools of philosophies, literates of all kinds, all steeped in Greek paganism — this was Athens as Paul saw it in A. D. 52. This is what the pagan Lucian has in mind, ‘When I first came to Athens I was astonished and delighted to see all the glory of the city.’ Pagan writers remark regarding the plethora of temples and statues. Petronius satirically remarks that in Athens it was easier to find a god than a man. In his fine description Pausanias states that Athens had more images than all Greece put together. Xenophon calls Athens ‘one great altar, one great offering to the gods.’ Livy writes, ‘In Athens are to be seen images of gods and men of all descriptions and made of all materials.’ In the Agora every god of the Olympus found a place. Every public building was at the same time a sanctuary that was dedicated to one or more gods. Besides the ordinary gods there were deifications of Fame, Modesty, Energy, Persuasion, etc.” (Acts of the Apostle, R. C. H. Lenski). It appears that the city of Athens housed every idol imaginable to the mind of man. Even to the point of erecting an “altar with this inscription, To An Unknown God” (Acts 17:23). If we were to take a moment to consider the condition of the city, we should not be astonished at the findings. When we look at religion in our own society, we see the same to be true. In many instances, they all profess to follow the same God, yet, by virtue of doctrine and practice, a person is able to see that our society serves many gods, under the guise of the one true God.

Christianity is a common enough phrase in our society. Many organizations claim to be “Christian” in doctrine and practice. The question is, “Are they?” Could they not just as well be serving some man-made god under the guise of Christianity? What makes doctrine and practice “Christian”? Is it not “following Christ”? Is it not simple enough to determine what allegiance is being paid by a comparison of doctrine and practice, as is set forth in the Bible? The apostle Paul once instructed the Corinthian Christians that they should “learn not to go beyond the things which are written” (1 Corinthians 4:6). The danger of apostasy is not only possible but also probable. Paul told the young evangelist Timothy, “But the Spirit saith expressly, that in later times some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons, through the hypocrisy of men that speak lies, branded in their own conscience as with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by them that believe and know the truth” (1 Timothy 4:1-3). In like manner he told Timothy, “For the time will come when they will not endure the sound doctrine; but, having itching ears, will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and turn aside unto fables” (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

When we look at the religious society within which we live, what do we see? Do we not see many different doctrines and practices? The apostle Paul affirmed that “God is not a God of confusion, but of peace” (1 Corinthians 14:32). Yet, that is what many in the religious world would have us believe. Do not fall for it. ret