

## IS UNITY MORE IMPORTANT THAN DOCTRINE?

One of the major themes coming out of the recent Spring Lectureship (Profiling Apostasy #2) was "unity in diversity." A theme of the Independent Christian Church for many years, it has also become a clarion call for the liberal rim of churches of Christ in recent years. Though this is no real surprise considering brethren have forsaken/revised so many other doctrinal positions: instrumental music, women in the worship and leadership positions, re-election of elders, fellowship with denominations, marital intent, etc. It is still with amazement that we see some brethren still completely unaware that a larger circle is now exploring this frontier.

A recent obituary in the *New York Times* is telling from the standpoint of the denominational view of religion, where everything goes and nothing much is according to the Bible anymore:

The Rev. Peter J. Gomes, a Harvard minister, theologian and author who announced that he was gay a generation ago and became one of America's most prominent spiritual voices against intolerance, died on Monday (Feb. 28) in Boston. He was 68. One can read into the Bible almost any interpretation of morality, Mr. Gomes liked to say after coming out, for its passages had been used to defend slavery and the liberation of slaves, to support racism, anti-Semitism and patriotism, to enshrine a dominance of men over women, and to condemn homosexuality as immoral.

He gave the benediction at President Ronald Reagan's second inauguration and delivered the National Cathedral sermon at the inauguration of Reagan's successor, George Bush. At Harvard, Mr. Gomes was the Plummer professor of Christian morals at the School of Divinity and the Pusey minister of Memorial Church, a nondenominational center of Christian life on campus.

"Religious fundamentalism is dangerous because it cannot accept ambiguity and diversity and is therefore inherently intolerant," he declared in an Op-Ed article in *The New York Times* in 1992.... "Such intolerance, in the name of virtue, is ruthless and uses political power to destroy what it cannot convert.... In his 1996 best seller, *The Good Book: Reading the Bible with Mind and Heart*, Mr. Gomes urged believers to grasp the spirit, not the letter, of scriptural passages that he said had been misused to defend racism, anti-Semitism and sexism, and to attack homosexuality and abortion. He offered interpretations that he said transcended the narrow context of modern prejudices.... "The Bible alone is the most dangerous thing I can think of," he told *The Los Angeles Times*.... "You need an ongoing context and a community of interpretation to keep the Bible current and to keep yourself honest. Forget the thought that the Bible is an absolute pronouncement."

Oddly enough, there are different sets of brethren who, in their own way, hold to these views. First, the crowd that gathers for the Pepperdine, Abilene, Christian Church/churches of Christ, etc., lectureships, and those who are willing to

fellowship with brethren who speak of those contending for the faith as "intolerant and narrow" in their interpretation of what constitutes important or vital issues. The latter group no longer identifies anything in the brotherhood as false teaching. Imagine that! A whole group of brethren who cannot use a good portion of the New Testament because it speaks to false teachers/doctrine!

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