

The ‘O’ Word!

Have you noticed the frequency with which a certain ‘O’ word is being used by many believers? It is a word that has immense power in their eyes, a word that trumps almost everything else, a word that is used to justify the insertion of almost any non-scriptural practice into the life of the *ekklēsia*.

The ‘O’ word I have in mind is OPPORTUNITY. For many believers, OPPORTUNITY justifies almost anything and everything. If any activity they propose is questioned, the answer comes back: ‘But think of the OPPORTUNITY’!

Take the way the *ekklēsia* has become a forum where believers and unbelievers mix in one happy family, where unbelievers are absorbed into the activities and programmes of the church: believers and unbelievers are given the same welcome; they sing the same hymns in which they make the same professions, and avow the same convictions; they are all encompassed in the one public prayer; they are equally included in the reading of Scripture – passages which are nearly always addressed to believers; and both believers and unbelievers sit under the same lectures in which, for at least 95% of the time, all in the congregation are treated as believers.

And, in saying this, I am thinking of the best of such churches. I will not stop to deal with so-called churches which are little better than fast-food outlets, coffee shops and doughnut stalls – and worse!

When anybody challenges any of this, the answer comes back: ‘But think of the OPPORTUNITY’!

Christmas and funeral services for unbelievers (with full ‘Christian rites’ implied, if not stated, often tinged with a

mumbled get-out clause, in the effort to salve any tender conscience) are typical of what I am talking about.¹

There is not an atom of scriptural warrant for this; often, little or no biblical justification is attempted. No! All must bow to the god of the hour: OPPORTUNITY. OPPORTUNITY trumps all!

Just as an aside – but a very weighty aside – do the advocates of OPPORTUNITY ever think of the other side of the coin? They talk of OPPORTUNITY. But what of the unbelievers who spend decades in such an atmosphere, their sense of well-being regularly confirmed by attendance at funeral services for unbelievers, from which they can gladly – but mistakenly – draw the conclusion that all be well in the end? What of the day of judgment, when the advocates of OPPORTUNITY have to meet the deluded unbelievers who will be at the receiving end of Christ’s inevitable pronouncement of their everlasting doom?

I want to place on record my conviction that there is another ‘O’ word, a word which should replace OPPORTUNITY in this context. I am thinking of the word OBEDIENCE.

While we have no scriptural warrant for justifying almost any and every abuse of the *ekklēsia* in the name of OPPORTUNITY, there is overwhelming warrant for insisting on the believer’s OBEDIENCE to the law of Christ. Christ himself could not have been more explicit:

You call me teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am... I... your Lord and teacher... have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you... If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them (John 13:13-17). A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another (John 13:34). Believe... in me... believe me (John 14:1,11). If you love me, keep my commandments (John 14:15). He who has my commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves me (John

¹ For funeral services, see my *Deceit in Death: Christendom in the Raw: ‘Christian’ Last Rites for Unbelievers*. For the general point, see my *Relationship Evangelism Exposed: A Blight on the Churches and the Ungodly; Attracting Unbelievers to Church: Points to Ponder*.

14:21). He who does not love me does not keep my words; and the word which you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me (John 14:24). Abide in me (John 15:4). This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you (John 15:12). You are my friends if you do whatever I command you (John 15:14). These things I command you, that you love one another (John 15:17).

The apostolic position is clarity itself:

It is required that those who have been given a trust [that is, stewards] must prove faithful (1 Cor. 4:2).

Faithful to Scripture, of course.

Not:

It is required in stewards that a man be found clever at justifying will-worship with the mantra of OPPORTUNITY.

Christ's accolade to the OBEDIENT in the final day will be:

Well done, good and faithful servant! (Matt. 25:21,23).

Faithful to Scripture, of course.

I know of no warrant for saying that it will be:

Well done clever servant who used invented systems of his own so that he might take every OPPORTUNITY.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with the word OPPORTUNITY itself. Nor is there anything wrong with addressing a mixed congregation with the gospel. Indeed, there is everything to be said in its favour. The error I am driving at is the mixing of believers and unbelievers in the spiritual activities of the *ekklēsia*, and treating both parties as one and the same, or virtually so.² And all in the name of OPPORTUNITY.

Two Objections

Objection 1: But, contrary to what you say, we do use Scripture to justify our practice.

² See my *Letting Loose a Gadfly: Edward Miall Speaks Today*.

Answer: I agree. You do *use* Scripture to try to justify your practice. But this is precisely the point I am making. You start with your practice and *use* – note the word – you *use* Scripture to justify it. This is utterly wrong! Scripture must come first, and practice must follow. You have reversed the order. And this is fatal.³

What is more, as I have argued elsewhere, teachers who advocate your practice do not even use Scripture; they abuse or prostitute it.⁴

Objection 2: We are obeying Christ. He commanded us to go out into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15), and this is what we are doing.

Answer: No! In saying this, you could not have more clearly demonstrated the rightness of my response to the previous objection. By your practice, you are *not* going out into the world; rather, you are attracting the world into the *ekklēsia*. You are committing the same error as John Calvin in his attempted justification of mixed – regenerate and unregenerate – churches: he warped the parable of the wheat and tares (Matt. 13:24-30), saying that wheat and tares co-exist in the church throughout this age. Not at all. Christ taught that the field is the world, not the church!⁵ Similarly, Christ commands believers to go into the world to preach the gospel, not to attract unbelievers into the *ekklēsia* to try to evangelise them.

Three final thrusts

1. In all this, you are going directly against the plain command of Scripture that believers must keep themselves separate from the world (2 Cor. 6:14 – 7:1, for instance). It is one thing for believers to go out into the world on the gospel-rescue mission; it

³ See my ‘Hatpegs or Driving Seat?’

⁴ See my *Relationship Evangelism Exposed*.

⁵ See my *Infant Baptism Tested*.

is quite another for them in that attempt to mix the church and the world, mix believers and unbelievers in the *ekklēsia*.

2. By your practice of encouraging unbelievers to mix freely with believers in the *ekklēsia* – often over extended periods, reinforced by the precious truth of the gospel being promiscuously applied to both believers and unbelievers – you are the very least in danger of falling foul of Christ’s command: ‘Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs’ (Matt. 7:6).

3. In all this, and above everything else, remember that we are talking about Christ’s *ekklēsia* (Matt. 16:18). What right have we – what right have you – to tinker with the format, the ambience and the manifesto for his *ekklēsia* which Christ set out in his word?