

ONE QUESTION SATAN WANTS EVERY CHURCH TO ASK

Not all questions are good questions. Godly curiosity has limitations. The serpent's question, "Did God really say...?" (Genesis 3:1) resulted in the fall into sin. The question seemed innocent enough, which is exactly what Satan wanted. After all, the tree was a delight to the eyes and desirable (Genesis 3:6). But not all questions should be entertained. Satan will use questions to cast doubt on God's Word and His goodness. Adam and Eve questioned God's Law and ultimately rejected their limitations as a curse rather than receive them as a blessing. Satan tempts us to question God's Law before we sin. After all, we know that He is a loving and forgiving God. "Would He really mind it if I... (fill in sin of your choice)?" After we set God's Law aside and act on our sin, then comes the guilt. Now Satan tempts us to question the Gospel. "How could God possibly love me?" we wonder, fearful that God might just hold that one against us. Such questions are not godly.

Questions are one of Satan's favourite tools to divide the church. Some questions are best not asked. One question Satan wants every congregation to ask is, "What kind of church do we want to be?" The question may seem innocent enough at first; maybe it even seems like a vital question. But there's a subtle, yet demonic, sleight of hand going on here. It's the same old trick from Eden. Satan distracts us from God's Word by getting us to imagine what we'd do differently if we were in charge. When a question like "What kind of church do we want to be" is asked, it is easy for a congregation to unwittingly replace God's purposes for the church with their own agenda. We do not decide what the Church is or should be doing. The Church is the Bride of Christ, called to submit to Him in all things (Ephesians 5:24)

When congregations ask themselves what kind of church they want to be, the results are detrimental. For one, the human will is sold as a slave to sin and desires things that are neither godly nor good for us. "*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?*" (Jeremiah 17:9). In the time of the Judges "*everyone did what was right in his own eyes,*" (Judges 21:25), and the results were catastrophic. The Church is not free to define herself however she pleases. Christ has set us free from sin not to live however we like, but so that we might live freely as slaves to righteousness (Romans 6:18). The Church delights in her slavery to the Word of God, turning aside from it neither to the right nor to the left (Psalm 1:2; Joshua 23:6; John 8:31). This is not a compulsive slavery, but one of willing obedience and great delight. Even a menial task like serving as a door-keeper in the house of God is so much better than revelling in the tents of the wicked (Psalm 84:10).

Doorkeepers don't seek to rearrange the affairs of the household. If anything, they keep those who would disturb the household out. "What kind of church do we want to be" is a question that can only disrupt the operation of God's household. There are as many answers to this question as a congregation has people. Conflict and division are the inevitable result. Satan wants congregations to get wrapped up in themselves, and this question is a great way for him to accomplish that. No longer is the Word of God the basis for a congregation's identity. Opinion is supreme, and the will of the mighty (or majority) will inevitably be imposed on the weak. This is not the way of Christ. Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus (Hebrews 12:2), for in Him, we see that true greatness is found in becoming a slave (Matthew 20:27-28).

Better questions, Christ-centred ones, must be asked. Is God's Word being taught in its truth and purity? Are the Sacraments correctly administered? Does our pastor provide faithful pastoral care? Do our practices best serve the proclamation of the Gospel? Do they agree with our confessions? Are we promoting those things which are true, honourable, just, pure,

lovely, commendable, excellent, and praise-worthy (Philippians 4:8), or are we promoting ourselves? Are we eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3), or are we using our freedom in the Gospel as an excuse to do what is right in our own eyes? Where individual freedom is considered more important than faithfulness to Christ and walking together, Satan's work has been done. The first Adam used freedom to pursue his own good (or so he thought) and became a slave to sin. The Second Adam used His freedom to pursue the good of others and become a slave to all. As St. Paul says, "*Do nothing from rivalry and conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you not look to his own interests, but also to the interests of others,*" (Philippians 2:3-4).

The challenge for the Church today is to resist entertaining questions that take the focus off of Jesus and so divide His Body. Not all questions are good questions. Self-serving questions do not edify the Church. We must be careful to avoid the temptation to re-create the church after our own image and likeness. The Church is not her own, for she has been bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20). She has been called out of the darkness not to bear witness to herself, but to bear witness to Christ (1 Peter 2:9). The words of John the Baptist could serve as a motto for every Christian and every church: "*He must increase, but I must decrease,*" (John 3:30). As the blood-bought Bride of Christ (Acts 20:28), the Church is not ours to do with as we please. Rather, the Church freely submits to her Heavenly Bridegroom in all things (Ephesians 5:24), so that all blessing and honour and glory and might be to God and the Lamb, now and forever (Revelation 5:12-13).