

What is a Para-Church?

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There seems to be a bit of confusion around today concerning so called para-churches and that they aren't Biblical.

Well, that's correct isn't it?

No. The word 'para-church' is a made up word with a made up definition. The word 'para-church' can't be found in the Bible. Paul the apostle would put 'para-churches' into the doctrine category.

What do you mean?

If you will read the following

"Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them." (Rom 16:17) and **"A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject; Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself."** (Titus 3:10-11)

So what?

Paul's concern was for those who were not "singing off the same page" – those who didn't have the same doctrine as him.

He states in no uncertain terms:

"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;" (2 Tim 4:3) and **"A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach"** (1Tim 3:2) and **"But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine:"** (Titus 2:1) and **"...they teach no other doctrine"** (1Tim 1:3)

"Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine." (1Tim 4:13).

You see, Paul's big thing was about the importance of doctrine, and, in fact mentions the word 16 times in 1&2 Timothy and Titus.

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What's your point?

Paul couldn't care less whether or not someone, or some body, were a para-church or not. What he cared about was that people had the same doctrine as he did.

So?

The vast majority of churches around today, by Paul's criteria, would be classed as para-churches, as they don't have the same doctrine as he outlines in his epistles to the churches.

For example?

1. Some believe people in the OT got saved the same way they do in the NT.
2. Some believe we are under the new covenant now.
3. Some believe in the Gap Theory.
4. Some don't believe in an imminent rapture.
5. Some place an overemphasis on water baptism (would Paul call himself a Baptist in the light of 1 Cor 1:17. I think not.)
6. Some churches refer to their constitution rather than their Bibles to sort out matters and so on.
7. Some believe that Hebrews is doctrinal for the Tribulation.
8. Some completely misunderstand the meaning of the Song of Solomon.
9. Some get their doctrine out of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
10. Some misunderstand the meaning of the Lord's supper and use inappropriate scriptures to accompany this ordinance.
11. Some churches are trying to get back to the early church found in the book of Acts.
12. Some believe that we are chosen into Christ before the foundation of the world.
13. Some don't understand the difference between "the kingdom of heaven" and "the kingdom of God".
14. Some prefer the Greek and Hebrew "originals" (although no-one has a clue where they are or what they say) to the plain English of the King James Bible.
15. Some misunderstand the difference between "the day of Christ" and "the day of the Lord".
16. Some misunderstand the difference between "the Son of God" and "the Son of man".
17. Some still preach about tithes being for today.
18. Some believe in the gospel being written in the stars.
19. Some believe that a pastor should be a husband only once.
20. Some believe in Calvinism.

So?

However we don't reject these people as many of them are brothers in the Lord, but we receive them as having weaker faith.

Are you saying then that most pastors shouldn't be pastors?

Put it this way, a pastor has to be a shepherd not just a herder of sheep. Unfortunately today, many fall into this category. Many have become "**brutish**" (Jer 10:21). They control, drive and dominate but they do little shepherding.

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Well should a pastor be a pastor if he doesn't teach correct doctrine?

Should a shepherd be a shepherd if he feeds his sheep the wrong food? You see, to those who would use the para-church label about others, they first need to get their own backyard in order.

Aren't we under the great commission?

Of course not. We can see what they are trying to say when they preach the great commission, but Paul clearly outlines his "great commission" and his ministry is as follows **"And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation."** (2Cor 5:18-19) The great commission of Mark was given to the apostles by Jesus before Paul came along.

But aren't we to preach the gospel?

Yes, but Paul's gospel is not the great commission and the latter is misconstrued as Paul's. Furthermore, you will notice that for those that will preach this gospel, there would be certain things that would happen as well. To wit: **"And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover."** (Mark 16:17-18)

What's your point?

For those who preach this gospel, they will have signs and wonders following them ie casting devils, tongues speaking, serpent handling, drinking poison and physical healing. And so for those who would congregate under the banner of the preaching Mark 16 gospel, they can fully expect to have signs following them. But they must be more than a little disappointed when the attendant signs don't manifest.

I don't follow you.

Look it's this simple. God uses everyone who goes out and preaches about Jesus according to the gospel of Paul. Correct doctrine has never been the hallmark for people getting saved. If people want to use the great commission to rally others to preaching so be it. The end result is the same but they didn't have correct doctrine. Has God cast them aside for not having Pauline doctrine? No. If people are under Mark's great commission, where are their following signs? Answer? There are no signs so therefore something must be wrong. Haven't they got enough faith? Aren't they trying hard enough? Is there sin in their lives?

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What's the blockage then?

None. The gospel that Jesus gave to the apostles to preach is not the gospel given to Paul. While they are presumably preaching Paul's gospel, they are innocently doing it under another banner. No problem. But this only goes to show that these people who are promoting the 'evils' of people undertaking para-church activities, are themselves guilty of wrong doctrine, because they don't know the difference.

So, what's the solution?

Paul says that if you don't have correct doctrine, you are a heretic and are to be avoided and rejected. Do we do this then? No. They are hopefully brothers in the Lord and are to be encouraged to preach Paul's gospel.

You sound a bit superior don't you?

Look, some people are doing a great work for the Lord in their churches – getting kids to Sunday school and teaching them about the Lord and getting the little kids saved and that is absolutely tremendous because we all know what the Lord thinks about those who would hurt and destroy little children. However when it comes to correct doctrine, there are a few serious foundational cracks that appear.

Where is all this leading?

Quite simply we wouldn't call these people para-church organizations just because they don't have the doctrine of Paul. No, we pray that God will bless their efforts and we get out of the way. As Paul would say **"Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: The one preach Christ of contention ..."** (Phil 1:15-16).

Look people preach Christ with wrong motives, wrong doctrine, wrong denominational attachments and most without the doctrine of Paul. Are we to be upset? No. We pray the Lord will use them for his glory and as he sees fit to get people saved. We must remember that we are in the very last of the very last of times and that many churches are part of the **"falling away"** (2Thess 2:3)

As someone once said "It's better to be a para-church than a para-lysed church."