

Big-Tent Religion

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Members of both major political parties talk about big-tent policies. By big-tent they mean inclusion of diverse views that may be contradictory to core party principles—as long as their holders vote the party ticket. Men will long debate whether or not this tactic represents good politics, but it obviously represents considerable compromise.

The big-tent approach to religion is evident on every hand. The major denominations once had certain principles to which one must conform for membership, but big-tent religion has largely erased them. Formerly, those who had been divorced and remarried without Jesus' Scriptural cause (Mat. 5:32; 19:9) were excluded. Earlier, women were not allowed to occupy pulpits. As recently as the late 19th century there was fierce opposition to instrumental music in worship in some denominations (e.g., Presbyterianism). The big-tent policy has convinced some denominations to admit impenitent homosexuals—some even to appoint them “Ring Masters” in their religious “tents.” Others are “studying” such tent enlargement.

The community/mega-churches glory in the big-tent syndrome. These groups shun denominational identity and they thrive on inclusiveness—which they strongly emphasize. Some of these groups arose from community-wide polls that asked residents what they wanted in a “church.” The pollsters then tailored a “church” to fit the tally. They usually feature a grace-only, non-judgmental, guilt-free, feel-goodism “gospel,” rooted in pop-psychology. The big-tent approach almost guarantees the need for a literal “big tent” to accommodate the crowds it attracts.

Not to be outdone, the big-tent bug has bitten a multitude of churches that were faithful to the Lord a few decades ago. The church-growth passion has led them to unauthorized means for its achievement. As the denominations have done, many of these congregations have opened wide the tent flap to those living in adultery. Some have thrust women in leadership roles. Some have added instrumental music to their circuses. “Open membership,” to one degree or another (e.g., accepting members based on their denominational membership), can quickly enlarge the crowd in the tent.

Not all are willing to stretch their tents to this degree—at least not yet. However, especially over the past decade, some brethren have shown a decided proclivity for inviting into their tents those who were never welcomed there before. The strange thing about these invitations is that earlier, these brethren were publicly and privately decrying such invitees. They have not merely let these camels get their noses under the tent; they have invited them inside,

humps and all. It's enough to make "Ahab the Arab" scratch his head in bewilderment (my apologies to Ray Stevens).

Were Jesus and the apostles big-tent preachers, promoting a big-tent church? You be the judge:

- "Except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24a).
- "Except ye repent, ye shall all...perish" (Luke 13:3).
- "Except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God!" (John 3:5).
- "For narrow is the gate, and straitened the way, that leadeth unto life, and few are they that find it" (Mat. 7:14).
- "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Mat. 7:21).
- "I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Mat. 16:18b).
- "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned" (Mark. 16:16).
- "Wherefore Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord..." (2 Cor. 6:17a).
- "If any one cometh unto you, and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not into your house, and give him no greeting: for he that giveth him greeting partaketh in his evil works" (2 John 10–11).

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