

A Bell, A Kettle, And A Dilemma

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An Open Examination Of The Salvation Army

Introduction: (Scripture Reading: 2 John 1:5-11)

A. There are certain sights, sounds, and smells that are uniquely Christmas. These are harbingers of the Christmas season. It seems they begin around thanksgiving and intensify as the day approaches:

1. Turkeys give way to hams in the freezer section; trees with lights go up in stores, homes, and throughout town; homes are decked out in lights; the smell of pumpkin spice gives way to the smell of cinnamon, evergreens, peppermint, and fresh baked cookies; Christmas music is played on the radio in cars & stores; and our favorite classic movies are played on tv 24/7.
2. Another familiar sound and sight of Christmas is the ringing of a bell and the red kettle. This has become almost as much a symbol of Christmas as a Christmas tree or reindeer!
3. We all know that behind the kettle and bell is The Salvation Army. They are seen mostly as a charitable organization... what most don't see is that they're another denominational church

B. Herein lies the dilemma: Part of me feels compelled to give to this group because of the good they do in society, but part of me cringes at the thought because I know they are a denominational group:

1. Some would call me zealous or even crazy for not giving, but I wouldn't give to any religious group for whatever the reason was if they teach things that contradict God's word.
2. **Illustration:** Bell ringer at Gadsden mall who confronted me about not giving. BIG SCENE!
3. It may be that some of you are already ready to write me and this sermon off because you know I am about to speak against an organization that is respected & loved by many. I just ask that you honestly look at who they are and compare their organization to the word of God.
4. Some of you may never have heard this information before. Others have known something was wrong with them, but not what. And some may be well informed. Please be fair in your evaluation of this group and have an informed response to them based on the word of God.

Understanding The Salvation Before You Give:

A. A look behind the bell, kettle, and apron into The Salvation Army organization:

1. While today, The Salvation Army is the second largest "charity" in the United States, it had a much humbler beginning in 1865 on the streets of London with a man named William Booth:
 - a. As a young man he joined the Methodist church and later on, in 1844, had a "conversion experience." A couple years later he became a revivalist preacher in the Methodist church.
 - b. Booth "walked the streets of London to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to the poor, the homeless, the hungry, and the destitute. Booth abandoned the conventional concept of a church and a pulpit, instead taking his message to the people. His fervor led to disagreement with church leaders in London, who preferred traditional methods. As a result, he withdrew from the church and traveled throughout England, conducting evangelistic meetings. (http://www.salvationarmyusa.org/usn/www_usn_2.nsf/0/816de20e46b88b2685257435005070fa?opendocument)
 - c. His "...early motivation was to convert poor Londoners — and eventually prostitutes, gamblers and alcoholics — to Christianity. Recognizing that his followers needed more than just religion to improve their lives — and that the way to attract the destitute was the provide services — Booth provided meals, clothing and other assistance to his early converts. He was

famous for saying, "Nobody ever got saved while they had a toothache." (Read more: <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1863162,00.html#ixzz1f7HB79rU>)

- d. In 1865 he organized "The East London Christian Mission." He changed it to "The Salvation Army" in 1878. In 1867 Booth had 10 full time workers. By 1874 there were 1,000 volunteers and 42 evangelists. He was called "General" and the people known as the "Hallelujah Army"
- e. It's N.Y. charter (1899) states it is "designed to operate as a religious and charitable corporation" whose purpose "is to lead men and women into a proper relationship with God"
2. The Salvation Army does not hide the fact that it is a religious organization. Perhaps this is overlooked because it isn't called a church or because what we see most from it is its charitable work:
 - a. The Salvation Army considers itself a church... one of many churches that make of the body of Christ (denominational concept). It identifies itself as an evangelical group. "The Salvation Army is a Protestant denomination of the Christian Church with over 1.6 million members in 109 countries." (http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/subdivisions/salvationarmy_1.shtml)
 - b. They have a church building where they meet regularly for worship... There is no set order. Songs and music play a big role. There are spontaneous prayers, scriptures read, and a sermon.
 - c. Music plays a major role in their worship. They're big on "brass bands." They do more traditional Christian songs, but also take music hall songs & popular songs and change the words.
3. The Salvation Army has a military style organization and even carries that appearance in some ways:
 - a. There are adherents who support the Army but aren't part of it, soldiers who are the regular members, and officers who are like clergy. The entirety of The Salvation Army is headed up by a General who has a "Chief of Staff" in various overseas departments. A local church is called a "Corps." Those who are becoming members are called recruits.
 - b. Members of The Salvation Army wear military looking uniforms to worship. The leaders regularly dress in such uniforms with emblems that designate their position in the church (Pictures)
 - c. It has denominational structure: "In the United States, the Army is divided into four Territories, with headquarters in New York, Chicago, Atlanta and San Francisco. Each has its own commander with rank of Commissioner or Lieutenant-Commissioner. There is also a National Commander with headquarters in New York. . ." (What is the Salvation Army? pg. 10)
 - d. Some have compared the structure of the Salvation Army to that of the Roman Catholic church.
4. Let's take a moment and look at what the Salvation Army church actually believes:
 - a. The Salvation Army has what is called "The Eleven Articles Of Faith." There is nothing in these that really sets them too much apart from what other denominations in our society teach – But here's a couple of the articles that are noteworthy for our study (from www.salvationarmy.usa.org)
 - 1) Article 5 teaches inherited guilt of sin & total depravity: "We believe that our first parents were created in a state of innocence, but by their disobedience, they lost their purity and happiness, and that in consequence of their fall, all men have become sinners, totally depraved, and as such are justly exposed to the wrath of God."
 - 2) Article 8 states, "We believe that we are justified by grace through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and that he that believeth hath the witness in himself."
 - 3) Article 9 states, "We believe that continuance in a state of salvation depends upon continued obedient faith in Christ."
 - b. The direct operation of the Holy Spirit: While a man may hear "the gospel message many times, by this inner illuminating (of the Holy Spirit) he now knows it to be true, and true for him personally" (<http://www.christiancourier.com/articles/618-an-analysis-of-the-salvation-army>)

- c. They don't baptize & teach it's not for salvation. They have a "faith only" approach to salvation. Baptism is seen as a ritual and empty of meaning. They say, "As God meets us in Jesus, we can receive his grace without prescribed rituals and experience real communion with him by the exercise of faith." (*Salvation Story*, pg 107) – Note: The Lord's Supper is excluded too!
- d. The Salvation Army allows for women to be preachers. Actually, the fourth and nineteenth generals (top leader in the church) were women (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ordination_of_women)
- e. They have taken a seemingly strong stance against homosexuality, which has caused problems since they are a charity and a church rolled into one. But it's a little weak: "The Salvation Army believes, therefore, that Christians whose sexual orientation is primarily or exclusively same-sex are called upon to embrace celibacy as a way of life." (www.salvationarmyusa.org)

B. In light of the fact that they aren't just a charity but also a denominational group, consider some Biblical principles that should govern our response to The Salvation Army:

1. Even though they accomplish much social good, it does not change the fact that this is a church that does not teach & stand for the truth! There is some truth in what they teach, but there is also much error!
 - a. They neglect God's plan of salvation (**Acts 2:38**). They also do not practice the communion at all (**1 Cor. 11:23-26**). The Calvinistic doctrine of inherited sin & total depravity contradicts God's word (**Ezek 18:20; Rom 5:20**). Women are placed in unscriptural positions (**1 Tim 2:11-12**)
 - b. The Bible labels people who teach things that contradict God's word as false teachers (**2 Peter 2:1**)
 - c. Paul uses stronger language for those who teach a different gospel... Let them be accursed! He said it wasn't that they teach a totally different gospel, but the truth distorted. This fits T.S.A. well since much of what they say is right but they change some things (**Gal 1:6-8**)
 - d. I know this becomes an emotional issue. We see the good done. The world sees the good done. And so it's hard to see them as anything but good. The fact that they do much good socially, does not change the spiritual damage that is done by their false teaching (**Matthew 7:15**)
3. Not only do they teach things that contradict God's word, but the way they collect and use money also goes against the pattern of the New Testament (**1 Cor. 16:1-2; Romans 15:26**)
 - a. There are no churches in the N.T. having anything like a thrift store or setting up kettles & ringing bells to raise money. There's only one way they raised money... A voluntary collection from the church members on the first day of the week. This was how they financed their work!
 - b. Churches in the N.T. did not take on the work of relieving the social needs of the community around them or the world. When they responded as a church, it was always to Christians who were in need. The social work of the Salvation Army as a church is foreign to the NT!
 - c. Churches in the New Testament were never instructed to get involved in physical concerns and social issues as a church (except in the case of a needy Christian). Everything churches are told to do in the New Testament is spiritual in nature. A church-charity goes against this.
 - d. So with this in mind I immediately have two problems putting money in Salvation Army kettles: (1) I would be participating in a church collecting money in a way I believe is wrong (2) I would be giving money to a church to do a work that I believe goes against the plan of God.
4. We have to be cautious about how we respond to such a group as The Salvation Army... being careful that we don't show approval or fellowship in what they do (**2 John 1:5-11; Gal. 1:9; Rom. 16:17**)
 - a. You may say, "I'm not approving their church, but their charity." - The problem is that you cannot separate the church from the charity. They exist as both at the same time.
 - b. We are not to greet those who teach false things in such a way as to share in what they are doing... we are to see them as accursed... we are to watch out for them and avoid them.

- c. You have to make personal decisions about how far to take this. Is it wrong to shop at their thrift store? To donate furniture, clothes, & toys? To put money in the kettle? Wherever you draw the line, you must be sure that what you do is with a good conscience **(Rom 14:23)**
5. So we face a dilemma as Christians. But you know where there's no dilemma at all? Finding people who are in need and personally reaching out to help them. This is commanded by God of us and helps us to imitate Christ. Individually, we can & should help anyone in need! Though carried out wrongly, we should at least appreciate the Salvation Army's zeal in helping others! **(Jas 1:27; Matt 25:31-46)**

Here's some interesting information on William Booth. This provides a little insight into his background and what influenced the start of the Salvation Army church:

In 1890 AD, William Booth, church minister and founder of the Salvation Army, was influenced by Heinroth's 1818 AD book and adopted the view that men who chose to sin can slide down a slippery slope into involuntary insanity. "some men of science [Heinroth] hold that persistence in habits tends to convert a man from a being with freedom of action and will into a mere automaton". Both Booth and Heinroth believed that insanity was a robotic state that was entered by freewill choices to engage in sin and that they should be committed to asylums against their will and taken care of at tax payer expense. Although the salvation Army is a church that actually refuses to baptize or partake of the Lord's Supper, they are really not viewed as a religion by the general public, but a type of public charity helping human suffering. It may come as a surprise to many that Booth's view was to "only help them who help themselves" and throw into an asylum, "those who refuse to help themselves": "when all has been done and every chance has been offered, when you have forgiven your brother not only seven times but seventy times seven, when you have fished him up from the mire and put him on firm ground only to see him relapse and again relapse until you have no strength left to pull him out once more, there will still remain a residuum of men and women who have, whether from heredity or custom, or hopeless demoralisation, become reprobates." Booth viewed the insane as a "lost soul on this side of the grave". He understood that laziness was a huge common factor with the insane and recommends involuntary committal to an asylum anyone who refused to work or care for themselves: "There are men so incorrigibly lazy that no inducement that you can offer will tempt them to work; so eaten up by vice that virtue is abhorrent to them, and so inveterately dishonest that theft is to them a master passion. When a human being has reached that stage, there is only one course that can be rationally pursued. Sorrowfully, but remorselessly, it must be recognised that he has become lunatic, morally demented, incapable of self-government, and that upon him, therefore, must be passed the sentence of permanent seclusion from a world in which he is not fit to be at large." He viewed the insane as, "carrying with them the contagion of moral leprosy, and multiplying a progeny doomed before its birth to inherit the vices and diseased cravings of their unhappy parents." It was on this basis that his charitable efforts must cease: "But when they have reached a certain point [of sinfulness] access to their fellow men should be forbidden." ... "after an [insane] individual had suffered a certain number of convictions for crime, drunkenness, or vagrancy, he should forfeit his freedom to roam abroad and curse his fellows. ... I include vagrancy in this list" Booth viewed the insane as condemned sinners engaging in sinful behaviours that the general public should be protected from coming in contact with. (In Darkest England and the Way Out, William Booth 1890 AD)

(Excerpt taken from <http://www.bible.ca/cr-Salv-Army.htm>)