



# THE DANGERS OF ANTIGROUPISM

Based on a sermon preached by Denny Kenaston, June 1991

*“Antigroupism” is a broad word. One can place a multitude of names in place of “groupism,” but the goal of this article is to reveal the dangers that are lurking around anyone who has an antigroup attitude towards some church group in their past, or perhaps a church group around them. We are dealing with the attitude in this article, in a general way. You, the reader, need to make the application wherever the specific fits. We could say, for example, that we are concerned about the danger of anti-Amishism. Or, we could say, we are concerned about the danger of anti-Baptistism or anti-Pentecostalism.*

Antigroupism stems from many different things, and many are the reasons that you may say, “Phew, Mennonites ...” Or, “Ugh, Baptists ...” There may be many different reasons why you have developed an attitude against some group—whatever name they might have. I warn you, there is some real danger behind that attitude!

It could be that you had a traumatic experience with a certain group in your past church life. One occasion that comes to my mind is a young man that went through a church split. Now church splits are not good—certainly an unfortunate experience. But usually when there is a church split, somebody gets hurt; usually young people who are confused and don’t understand what is right and who they are supposed to follow. So they get hurt.

Anyway, this one particular case I am thinking of was a young man that got hurt in a church split. It happened to be a Mennonite church that split. So his attitude was, “Mennonites, puh ... I don’t ever want to see another one. I never want to hear of one. And I am never going to go to a Mennonite church again as long as I live.”

He had a traumatic experience in his life, which caused him to develop an attitude that is detrimental to his spiritual life. He is half shipwrecked already because of this attitude.

You may have been hurt in a past church experience, in a situation where someone dealt with you in a wrong way. Perhaps they were too hard on you, and sort of kicked you

around spiritually—possibly you were even driven or excommunicated from that church. Because of that, you have developed an “antigroup attitude” within you.

Sometimes people grow up in a church setting that says, “This is the way we do things around here. We have the right way, and if you want to go to heaven, you do as we say and get baptized into the church, and everything will be alright.” Then someone wakes up to see that error exists in the church, and that salvation is by following Jesus, not the man-made rules. Often the immediate reaction is to develop an attitude about “that church” that taught them wrong things all their life.

Or maybe you were in a group that took an extreme position about some truth in the Bible. Because of that extreme position—after all, taking things to extreme is false doctrine—you developed an antigroup attitude.

Consider a pendulum. When a pendulum is pulled to one side and released, it swings to the opposite side an equal distance. How often we overreact to error, just like a pendulum! When we see something that is wrong, our natural tendency is to swing to the other side. In our zeal to get as far away from error as we can, we often end up in another error on the other extreme.

But praise God for the balancing of the Word and of other brothers and sisters, and of those gentle promptings of the Spirit of God! I think most of us could testify of where

our attitudes swung too far one way on some issue, and God had to bring them back to the middle.

In my own testimony, I went through one of those traumatic church experiences, and in reaction I wrote off everything from my past church experience. All of it! I said in my mind, “They hurt me. They have ruined me. They have taken care of future opportunities to minister. They must be totally wrong.” At that point, I quit witnessing and wrote off all my past church experience.

That is called antigroupism.

Of course, we all have different groups that we have reacted against, but the principle is still the same. Now God was very gracious to me in my experience. He was patient with me until the pendulum came back—truth was looked at properly and balance was restored. God worked out all of the antigroupism that was in my heart towards those people, and I thank God for that. People are sometimes shocked when I tell them that I now relate well with those who treated me wrong. It is all because that antigroup attitude got worked out of my heart.

There are several dangers in anti-group attitudes. Let’s look at them closely:

- If you hold those “anti” feelings in your heart, you will not be able to help the group you oppose.

It is God’s will that we reach out to those within our circle of influence. Each one of you has a circle of influence from your past into churches that I do not, and God wants to use that influence. But if you harbor “anti”—which signifies “opposed to, against”—attitudes, you will NEVER be able to minister to those people. We want to stand against the attitude that says, “I am against those people that I came from.”

What is very interesting to me is that often the very people that we hold attitudes against are the ones we want to reach out to the most; yet we cannot do it because of our attitude. When we reach out to them, they sense the attitude, and refuse to receive what we have to say. In reaction, they then will sometimes begin to “throw things back.” And I realize that this reaction of theirs will sometimes come even if we approach them in a pure way, but too often we carry an antigroup attitude towards the group we have left. So we then justify ourselves, and quote Paul’s words, “I go to the Gentiles ...” It is pretty hard to have a burden for people if you are disgusted with them for what they did to you in the past. It is hard to pray for them.

Paul had several reasons to have an anti-Jewish attitude. After all, he had been deceived by them in his childhood, being told that they had the right way, the only way. Paul be-

lieved this, so much so that he would imprison Christians to death for turning away from Judaism. Yes, he was deceived by his upbringing; he had plenty of “reason” to react against it. After he found faith in Jesus Christ, the Jews chased after him, wherever he went, causing him trouble. His name was well-known among the Jews, but in a negative way. They stoned him; they argued with him in all the public places; they had him thrown into prison; but not only that, he was even called by God to the Gentiles, so that he could have easily said, “Jews ... huh ... I am done with ’em! I’ve had enough of them! Somebody else minister to them: I am called to the Gentiles.” But listen to Paul’s heart in Romans 9:1-3:

*I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.*

Accursed from Christ for the sake of my people ... what an amazing attitude! There was no pendulum in his life. He kept the spirit and attitude of Christ through the whole thing; he still loved them. Even though they criticized him and persecuted him, he would not allow that antigroup attitude to rise up in his heart. In chapter 10 of the same letter, we can read some more of Paul’s heart to the Jews:

*Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.*

We can hear the burdened heart of Paul as he ponders his people. We cannot sense any reactionary spirit in these verses, but rather a pure, sweet desire that the Jews would come to the light and understanding that he himself had come to. Even though Paul did say those words, “I go to the Gentiles,” we need to hear his heart in the spirit in which he spoke them. It is not wrong to say those words and mean them, but may we have the same attitude that Paul had.

When the time came for Paul to return to Jerusalem, he could joyfully submit to the Jewish customs and do things that he knew were not necessary for his salvation. Had he had an anti-Jewish attitude when James came to him and said, “Paul, I want you to shave your head and go on a fast so that while you are here in Jerusalem there won’t be any trouble,” what do you suppose his response would have been? He may have spouted out something really “holy,”

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like, “I am free from the Law; I don’t have to do those things!” There were a lot of Scriptures he could have quoted to James. But yet his love for those people, his people, caused him to act without any “anti” reaction.

So we see that the first and foremost danger of an anti-group attitude is that we cannot help the ones we oppose; they will not receive what we have to say if they sense that attitude in us.

- An antigroup attitude will cause you to do things that will offend those very people.

You will not consider them when making choices in your life. Paul was not that way. His testimony was, “To the Jew I am going to be like a Jew, and to the Greek a Greek.” Paul did not have an uncaring, inconsiderate attitude when it came time to make choices. No, he did not compromise (he did not mean that he would take part in their ungodly ways to win them), but he did consider and think, “Is this going to cause hurt among those people? Is this choice going to further the Gospel among the Jews?”

If you have, for example, an anti-Amish attitude, you will not think like Paul did. In fact, even if someone would try to suggest the idea of submitting to “those people’s” ideas, you will immediately come up with one of those “righteous” answers. There are times, yes, to have those “righteous” answers, but I challenge you to consider what your attitude is, and ask yourself at decision time: “Will this hurt my opportunity to speak to those people? Is this worth doing?” After all, it may be more than just “that group” you are dealing with; “that group” may include those who are your brother or sister in the Lord.

Hear the words of the apostle Paul: “If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.” Consider how an “anti” attitude will blind you to this principle. You will make choices—buy things, go places, wear clothes, and do things—that will offend those you are trying to win.

- An antigroup attitude will hurt the next generation.

Perhaps you may have already heard words coming from the mouth of your children ... words that made your conscience twinge. The next generation is at our mercy. They are making evaluations based on our attitudes. It has been said—and is very true—that what we do wrong in moderation, our children will do in excess. Ponder that!

Maybe for you it is a simple, “Ugh, Mennonites ...” But for your children, that little sigh will cause them to write off

the whole Anabaptist movement and cause them to become wholly Evangelical. If we have a reactionary spirit towards a certain group of people or a certain set of principles, our children will react even stronger than we have.

Have you ever heard the words from some of “those people,” such as, “Watch where you are going, you will lose your children”? These are words given from observation—wise words! Well, the answer is not necessarily to return to the old group, because, yes, there were valid reasons for leaving it. But let’s develop a Christ-like attitude toward it, not a reactionary one.

- An antigroup attitude will cause you to throw away truth—pitch it!

We have all seen people who have reacted and thrown away beautiful truths, because “such-and-such a group hurt me and taught me wrong. I am getting away from them!” It causes people to go from a church with strong authority—perhaps too strong—to completely abandon the idea of authority in the church. It causes people to go from a church where there was strong brotherhood accountability, to no church at all. These folks don’t even believe that there is a church, and they stay at home.

Of course, the coming generation hurts tremendously for this. The hills are filled with these “individualists,” people who cannot find anyone anywhere to fellowship with—no one they can agree with. What causes this? Many times it was a bad experience in the past with a group that perhaps abused church authority. I recognize that there are cases of people who are in an area where there is no good congregation—I am referring to people who are not even seriously looking for a church anymore.

People also react from churches that focus primarily on the outward, and they leap into the error that says the outward doesn’t matter, only the heart. In the process, many powerful Bible truths get thrown out the door. The Scriptures say, “Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.”

What happens is, because of our “anti” attitude, we develop a blind spot. For example, take the subject of clothes. You may hear someone saying, “Clothes! I am so sick of hearing about clothes! I am sick of “plain suits” and cape dresses!” So the whole “clothes” thing gets pitched out ... and blindness comes over that person. And we stand back amazed at what those people end up doing. This all stemmed from that “anti” attitude—reactionism.



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- An antigroup attitude fosters pride and deception.

Here's how it happens ... remember that pendulum. We say, "They are wrong, and I am right. And I have got to prove that I am right, and they are wrong." This whole attitude is not good for us. An attitude that says, "We are right, we have the answers, we have found it ... and they are wrong!" will foster pride in us.

I remember a preacher once saying, "We don't need revival; we already have revival!" Now, I had been in a number of their church services, and I knew they didn't have revival among them. It seems that man honestly thought they had revival. However, spiritual pride had arisen in his heart and had so darkened his mind, convincing him that they were right, even when they were wrong. May God help us! May He keep us from overreacting in pride in some of these areas.

There was once a church that took some firm stands against apostasy, biblical stands, and they were right to do that. God blessed them for it. But spiritual pride came in. And now, that same church is so convinced that they are right, they say, "It has got to be done exactly like we do it, or it is not right." Slowly but surely, an attitude begins to develop in the congregation, "We are IT. This is THE place, the place where everyone needs to be." We need to be on guard so we do not begin to think we are better than others. God help us!

This is how an "anti" attitude develops into spiritual pride.

- There exists a danger of building a fellowship around "anti" attitudes.

Have you ever had "fellowship" like that? "Fellowship" centered around "them" and what "they" said and what "they" did, and what's happening "over there"? Ever spent a Sunday afternoon like that? Well, I have, and it is NOT very edifying. What a terrible foundation to build a church upon! Sadly, this happens all the time. The bottom line is, fellowship based on others' faults will not build the church. If you find it really easy to open up about "those people" and start shooting from the hip at "them," I encourage you

to just cleanse your heart of all that. Such talk will cause you shipwreck. Let's talk about Jesus!

Examine yourself and ask, "Do I have an antigroup attitude?" If you cannot discern your own heart, then just ask a couple of honest people that know you well. They can tell you!

If you have found that you indeed are infected, here is how to come clean.

1. You need to acknowledge it. This is the first step.

You need to forgive those who did you wrong, if you haven't. The antigroup attitude is there because you got hurt or misused.

2. You need to open your heart up and retain any and every thing that was good in the group you came from. Some are so reactionary that they will not even consider a truth if "that" group also believed it.

3. You need to purpose to overcome those attitudes, because they will want to haunt you for a long time if you have harbored them.

We need to remember the Lord Jesus, who came unto His own, but His own did not receive Him. How did He respond to those who did not receive Him? He laid Himself on the cross and died for

them! This is the attitude that God would have us foster towards our background.

Antigroupism has been a real hindrance to the furtherance of the kingdom of God, and a real hindrance to the perfection of the saints. Overreaction has shipwrecked many a soul, and blinded many others. May we be on our guard!

*This article is based upon a sermon preached by Denny Kenaston on June 2, 1991. It is not a literal transcription, but contains the essence of that message. You may receive a free cassette or CD of this message by writing to Dogq's Ministries, 400 W. Main St., Ephrata, PA, 17522. Ask for message #834 (The Dangers of Antigroup Attitudes). Or, it may be downloaded for free in MP3 format at [http://www.ephraministries.org/msg\\_detail.a5w?vlast\\_index=834](http://www.ephraministries.org/msg_detail.a5w?vlast_index=834)*



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