

Doctrinal Laxity and the Community Church Movement

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The religious world was once filled with men of courage and conviction. To them, religion was no game. When their convictions and conclusions were challenged they would boldly defend themselves, even in public forums. Such men have conducted good and profitable debates, both written and oral, in their desire to defend what they believe, teach and practice. I have always respected this kind of conviction, even among those with whom I differ. I greatly appreciate the courage and commitment of those who are motivated to openly oppose what they believe to be wrong, and to proclaim what they believe to be right. But where are these men today? Why is it that so few are willing to publicly defend their challenged positions? Are we no longer required to *"earnestly contend for the faith that was once delivered to the saints"* (Jude 3)? Are we no longer obligated to *"give an answer to those who ask questions regarding our faith"* (1 Pet. 3:15)? Shouldn't we continue to follow Paul's example in being *"set for the defense of the gospel"* (Phil. 1:17)? Since God's word is forever unchangeable (Psalm 119:89; 1 Pet. 1:25), we cannot blame the current doctrinal apathy upon the Scriptures. We must look elsewhere for the answer.

Attitudes Towards The Bible Have Changed

Fewer and fewer people believe in the inspiration and infallibility of God's word. They may still accept the Bible as "the good Book," but their definition of "good Book" falls short of the Bible's own testimony. True believers, defenders and practitioners of the Bible are those who believe that God is its author. Believing the Bible means believing its claims of authenticity and accuracy. Paul said, *"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work"* (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). Those who do not accept the Bible as being *from God* will feel little or no compulsion to do what the Bible tells them to do. Paul tells us that the Scriptures serve as our guide in all matters of faith

and practice. The Scriptures *inform us, convince and convict us, correct us*, and show us how to live *godly lives*.

According to Jesus, God's word is the standard by which we will be judged (John 12:48), and that word is to be consulted and considered in connection with every moral, ethical, spiritual and religious decision that we make. We are told, "*whatever you do, whether in word or in deed, do everything in the name of* (by the authority of, th) *our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Col. 3:17). God's word is the line between truth and error (1 Jn. 4:6). We must use this word to "*test the spirits, whether they be of God*" (1 Jn. 4:1). We must follow Paul's example in "*opening the scriptures*" and "*proving*" right from wrong (Acts 17:2-3). After testing all things by God's divine standard, let us then hold only to those things that pass that test (1 Thess. 5:21).

Being "breathed out by God," the Scriptures are thereby *holy*. The Bible is thus a *holy book*. Its contents are not to be profaned by the unholy hands and fallible minds of those who would either add to, or subtract from its teaching (Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32; Galatians 1:7-9; Revelation 22:18, 19). Failure to *speak* according to God's word will result in eternal damnation (1 Peter 4:11; Galatians 1:8-9; Isaiah 8:20). Failure to *act* according to God's word will also result in eternal damnation (Matthew 7:21-23). Those who disrespect God's holy word are far *more* likely to pervert its teaching, and far *less* likely to defend it.

King David was called "*a man after God's own heart*" (Acts 13:22). How did this come to be? One reason is that he viewed God's word as being indispensable to his salvation. He used terms like "precious," "pure," and "sweet" to describe God's law. He said it was of greater value to him than thousands of pieces of gold and silver (Ps. 119:72). Do you value God's word as much? I hope you view God's word as did the Thessalonians, who received the word "*not as the word of men, but as what it really is, the word of God...*" (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

The *Community Church Movement*

Perhaps the greatest evidence of doctrinal apathy is seen in the

community church or “mega-church” movement of our present age. Increasingly, churches are popping up around the countryside, which subscribe to no distinct set of established principles of faith and practice. These community churches are formed as a result of religious people of varying denominational backgrounds abandoning their doctrinal convictions and accepting the premise of “unity in diversity.” The objective Bible *“truth”* containing rigid standards of right and wrong, and truth and error is replaced with the New Age notion that *“your truth is not necessarily my truth.”* In this, they confess that their “truth” is not the same “truth” that was spoken by Jesus, for He said that God's *“word is truth”* (Jn. 17:17). They reject the notion that the Bible constitutes an absolute and understandable volume of truth. Their truth is less rigid and more compromising. This is precisely why they refuse to openly defend their beliefs and practices. They have no definite standard to which to appeal to make their defense! The expression *“buy the truth and sell it not”* (Prov. 23:23) is meaningless to them, for they have no conviction when it comes to truth.

The members of this new movement refer to themselves locally as *community* churches. Their only designation is a geographical one. They claim no *exclusive* affiliation with existing religious organizations, not because they are *non-denominational* (that would be great), but because they are *multi-denominational*. This allows them the privilege of accepting, as members, those who hold opposing and conflicting doctrinal views. Are they concerned that such a melting pot of beliefs might cause division and trouble? Not at all! They aren't concerned because their compromising views regarding matters of doctrine allow a spirit of tolerance to prevail. Though such differences do exist, the members of these progressive churches simply ignore them, decreeing them to be unimportant.

This raises an important question. Since when is *doctrine* “unimportant?” The apostle John wrote that one loses his fellowship with the Father and the Son if he refuses to *“abide in the doctrine of Christ.”* Furthermore, he went on to say that one loses his fellowship with God if he assists those who teach things contrary to the doctrine of Christ (2 Jn. 9-11). In view of this passage, how can one say doctrine is unimportant!

The "Clown" Ministry

I once saw a TV advertisement in which one of these churches (Hillvue Heights in Bowling Green, KY) was offering classes for *clowning, puppetry, drama and dance* (for a fee of \$25.00). Vendors would be set up on the grounds to sell the various materials and equipment necessary to perform in your area of interest and training. They were encouraging the members of other churches to come and take part in these training events, hoping they might possibly incorporate them into the "*ministries*" of their respective congregations. About the time you think you have seen everything, something like this comes along! I am amazed at how low some religious people will stoop in their efforts to attract visitors to their churches. These are nothing more than carnal enticements. They have no connection with the church for which Jesus died, and they are not approved by the "*doctrine which is according to godliness.*" I challenge anyone to find biblical authority for a church to teach *clowning, puppetry, drama or dancing!* In fact, most dancing is condemned in the Bible. The only God-approved dancing that one can find in the Bible was Old Testament religious dancing, and in those dances, men and women did not dance together.

It is our sincere hope and prayer that men and women return to the teaching of Christ in their religious endeavors. Once churches begin adopting practices like the above, all sense of restraint is gone. At such a point, churches will then do almost anything and claim to be doing it in the "name of the Lord." Let us guard ourselves against such a terrible misuse and misapplication of the Lord's holy word and name.

Conclusion

It is a rare thing to see a community church preacher or "leader" publicly defend what he teaches and practices. This is because the community church movement stifles genuine Bible conviction and turns people into compromisers. The survival of these churches depends upon their continued willingness to compromise the faith every time their popularity is threatened or diminished. This is why they are wrong. Jesus said, "*He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathers not with me scatters abroad.*" Where do you stand?

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