

The unfortunate reality in churches, is that with each “new teaching” there is a *necessity* to *replace* the “old teaching.” So the new teaching is by necessity, completely *intolerant* of the old teaching at the same time it is teaching tolerance of just about every belief. If it *is* true that the “fellowship” includes all of those in various denominations, why does it not extend to those across the pew who disagree with the “new teaching?” The logic is simply not consistent.

We *all* should work to bring about the unity for which our Lord prayed. That unity however, must be a unity based upon Truth.

"...If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32). "Buy the truth, and sell it not..." (Prov. 23:23). "...Love the truth..." (Zech. 8:19). "...Be not moved away from the hope of the gospel which ye have heard..." (Col. 1:23). "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17). (All are KJV)

The *standard* for unity must be the book of God — the Bible. It is our *only* source for sound doctrine.

"He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it" (Titus 1:9 NIV). "You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine;" (Titus 2:1 NIV). "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deed" (II John: 9-11 KJV).

Those who choose to not embrace the Truth and abide by the unity it brings will receive the condemnation of God.

"...They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness" (2 Thess. 2:10-12 NIV).

May God work in each member of His Church to reveal how we might have unity and bring others into His Church and not *abandon* his Word in our attempt to do so.

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DILIGENCE

"We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure." — Hebrews 6:11

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The environment in which many Christians find themselves today could make the following entry in a diary very likely.

Diary of a Former Member

Dear Diary,

It's good to write how I feel today. I need to get so much off my chest. I'm not attending (your church) anymore. I don't know how it happened but over the course of time I found that those things I believed were important, were replaced with an empty feeling of aloneness in a crowd of people who claimed to love me. Love, that disappeared quickly when I related my reasons for deciding to leave (your church) after many years of attendance.

Now that I have left, I look back and consider all of the people who passed through (your church). I never showed any concern for why they left. Were the reasons for their departure like mine? Could I have made a difference if I had shown concern for them rather than ignoring them. Why didn't I listen to the concerns they expressed instead of joining in on the condemnation that falls on anyone who chooses to stop attending (your church)?

I'll never know the answer to that question as it concerns (your church). Perhaps if I decide to attend another church, maybe I'll make an effort to show real and sincere concern for those who are struggling. Perhaps I'll spend less time seeking the comfort of those who make me feel good and more time with those I might be able to help feel better.

I guess I expected too much when I stopped attending (your church). Several weeks passed before anyone even noticed I was gone. When they did call me, I'm not sure why they did. I guess they wanted to show concern but seemed to find that difficult to do since they had never taken time to really get to know me. Oh, I was invited to several homes but mostly as part of larger groups so there was never much real conversation. It always seemed that they were much more comfortable passing out songbooks and singing. I sometimes wondered if that wasn't just a way to avoid talking about anything that might have been uncomfortable for them.

Another thing that was obvious when they finally did call me, was that the only reason they had called me then was that my name turned up on a list of people who hadn't been in attendance for quite awhile. I suspect it would have taken a

lot longer to notice I was missing if it hadn't been for that list. That proved to be very awkward for them. I could tell they were finding it difficult to make it appear that they had noticed my absence on their own. But that's ok. At least they had contacted me, even if I didn't think it was very sincere.

As they probed why I left and I began to tell them, they suddenly had the appearance of someone who wanted to leave so they could avoid knowing the truth concerning my situation. As I continued to explain why I had left, their pain became more and more apparent. But it didn't take me long to conclude that the pain I saw was a result of the fact that they didn't really want to know why I had left. One of them even told me that I was just being negative. (Guess he didn't understand that I wouldn't have decided to leave if I had felt that everything was perfect and positive). Anyway, I quickly saw that they certainly had no intention of evaluating whether or not my reasons were justified so I "let them off the hook" and decided not to say anymore. They sure did seem relieved. I think they were sorry they had ever asked.

The fact is that (your church) is not the church I used to know. It's empty. People say the right things, act in ways expected by their peers, but lack any ability to be real. There are groups that I'm aware of that meet and have done so on a regular basis for years. I just never was sure how to be invited to join one of those groups — or if I even wanted to meet with them if I had been invited. I'm not sure I would have felt very welcome anyway.

Since you are my diary and the place where I can "speak" openly without a whisper of condemnation I want to empty my feelings on the next few pages.

Let me start from the beginning. The origin of my journey is not unlike others who attended (your church). There are many there who are second and third generation members and are miles ahead of what I ever reached in feeling a part of (your church). They're usually referred to as "one of our own." I was never able to become one of those even though I was a part of (your church) for many years. Diary as you know, I was raised as a (denominational religion). When I met (name excluded) I was fascinated by the fact that not only did members of (your church) have a strong belief, but that they could readily give reasons for their belief using the Scriptures. I wanted to know more about that kind of faith.

I soon began to study. That caused me a lot of problems because I soon realized that several of the things I had accepted as biblically based practices were simply not a part of the Bible. Over time I grew to a level of understanding where it became necessary to abandon the direction I had grown up in, and accept Christ in the manner prescribed in Acts. I was baptized into Christ, as you know on April 22, 1982. You remember the entry, dear diary. It is such an important day to me.

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Over the last 20 years I've studied a lot and grew a lot both in spirit and in truth. The problem is at this point in time, it seems that I'm being told I didn't have to leave my previous denomination to be acceptable to God. Now the "fellowship" supposedly includes everyone who acknowledges that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. I experienced many tears and much heartache because of going against my family's faith tradition, but I'm still certain I did the right thing since I followed the examples of early Christians. I still believe it's essential to do what they did in order to be added to the Lord's church. I was intrigued by the fact that the church of Christ was non-denominational and without creeds or headquarters — just like the early church in the Bible.

For years I've learned from and taught others when I had the opportunity. But now I'm being told that when I express what I've learned in all of these years of Bible study, I'm "puffed up" with knowledge and not showing love. This is all very disturbing since I don't believe that division is caused because of studying God's Word. Isn't the goal of all of us to learn more and more about what God's will is for us? And His Word is the only source we have to do that.

The facts are now clear. All those things that the Bible stresses as important are now taught as only a matter of personal choice. It has disturbed me to the point that now, if I were to encounter someone searching for understanding of what God intends for people, I really wouldn't know where to start. I guess if I accepted this "new understanding" I'd have to tell them to just find a church, any church, near their home that believes Jesus Christ is the Son of God and place membership there. Problem is, I still think that the Lord adds to His church those that should be saved. I don't think we're in charge of choosing how we want to do that. I believe He's made it clear that there's only one way. After all, it is HIS church. HE owns it. We don't! HE makes the rules. We don't.

Well, it's time to stop for today. I pray that someone at (your church) will realize the departure from Scripture and its teachings. You see diary, (your church) chose to leave the Word, so I chose to leave (your church).

Exaggeration? No, this is unfortunately the position in which many Christians now find themselves. Blatant disregard for Scripture has made mockery of many foundational beliefs. They are being replaced with an all-encompassing blanket of tolerance and unity.

Any expressions of beliefs that are not in agreement with the "new interpretation" are under attack through gossip, name-calling, lies and public ridicule. Such behavior is not tolerant, loving or unifying. This behavior emulates humanism in secular society. No rules, no boundaries, no restraint. All understanding is subject to *individual* interpretation.

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