

Seek The Old Paths

"Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths...and walk therein."
(Jeremiah 6:16)

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SOME "DEFENSES" OF DENOMINATIONALISM

Roger D. Campbell

The existence of denominationalism is one of the greatest plagues in the history of mankind. It robs the Lord of the glory that He is due in His church (Eph. 3:21). Denominationalism, with all of its many different groups wearing different names and teaching different messages, causes great confusion in the minds of many people. Such confusion is not from the Lord, you can be sure of that (1 Cor. 14:33).

Denominationalism has many supporters. Let's consider some of the more common arguments people sometimes use in an effort to defend denominationalism. Why do they think it is alright?

1) *"It is good that there are so many churches/choices to choose from, because different people have different tastes."* Sometimes it is said this is like choosing a car or a mate (husband/wife), the variety is a plus.

Answer: Remember that illustrations don't prove anything. They simply are a way of using a "for instance" in order to try and show by illustration what we are saying.

In the spiritual realm, something is "good" only if it is God's way (1 Thess. 5:21,22). We must be careful and not make an appeal to what men like (their "tastes"), or to what appears to be good. Saul of Tarsus thought it was good to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth, but he was sincerely

wrong (Acts 26:9; Prov. 16:25)!

The major problem with this reasoning (having more "churches" is good 'cause it makes for more choices) is this: the New Testament plainly declares there is only one body, one church (Eph. 4:4; 1:22,23; 5:23-26; Matt. 16:18)! In the New Testament, there is no concept of "many different denominations." Men might defend their man-made denominations, but they just aren't in the Bible. That is a fact.

2) *"The Bible speaks about 'churches' (plural) being in existence in the first century. If it was right to have many churches then, then it is right now."* Romans 16:16 and other verses that mention "churches" are appealed to with the idea being that these "churches" were different denominations.

Answer: The "churches" (Gal. 1:2; 1 Thess. 2:14) were simply congregations of the Lord's church in different localities. They followed the same doctrine, taught the same message, and worshipped in the same manner. They simply were located in different places. It is a matter of historical record that Paul could not have been referring to modern denominations in any New Testament passage because no denominations existed at the time he wrote!

3) *"We are all going to the same place (heaven), we are just going by different roads. Just like you can travel many roads to a major city*

(like Atlanta), so there are many roads you can take and still end up in heaven. A person can get to heaven in any church."

Answer: Again, illustrations do not prove whether something is right or wrong, they simply demonstrate what a person is trying to express.

While it is true there are a number of different roads one can travel and still end up in Atlanta, consider this: If Jehovah had designated what road He wants us to take in our effort to get to Atlanta, would we not be obligated to take that road and do what He said in order to please Him? Of course we would. What about this: Isn't Jesus Christ the only way of salvation? He said Himself that He is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). If Jesus is "the way" to the Father in heaven, then that excludes all other ways or paths! Man made Atlanta and made many roads to enter it. However, God made heaven and made only one road to enter it (cf. John 10:1).

There is only one "doctrine of Christ" in which we must abide (2 John 9). One who abides in that teaching has the Father and the Son. The person that goes beyond that doctrine does not have God. Who said? God did (2 John 9).

The book of Acts shows there is

(Continued on page 76)
"Defenses"...

**READER'S COMMENT:**

Fight satan, not your brothers! Don't fret that somebody shoots left-handed because you shoot right. Don't grieve the Holy Spirit. You do not know him and have a typical Church of Christ conversion. You need to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. Micro analysis of the scripture takes away the passion. All Christ wants is your passion, because he uses passionate people.

ANSWER:

I truly wish you knew the Lord (1 John 2:3). You can KNOW the Truth and the Truth will make you free (John 8:32). But, you must learn and obey it first (Heb. 5:8-9). As long as you hang on to sectarianism, denominationalism, opinionism, emotionalism, you'll be hindered in knowing and obeying the Truth.

READER'S COMMENT:

How many baptisms in your church, in the last 2 months?

ANSWER:

I don't have a church. The Lord does. I'm a member of it. Can you give me "book, chapter and verse" regarding your question? Does the answer to that question somehow affect the Truth, obeying it, being faithful or being saved? What relation do baptisms have to do with loving the Truth, holding to the Truth? I fail to see the point. If I personally baptized 3 in the last 2 months, would that mean I was right with the Lord? If I baptized 8, would I "then" be right with the Lord? If I baptized 15, 32 or even 50, would that make me even better with the Lord? If I have not personally baptized anyone in the last 2 months, does that make me unfit for the Lord? Is there a quota somewhere in the Scriptures I've missed? Does the number of people that are baptized somehow relate to one's faithfulness to the Lord? Does it prove anything one way or

the other? There are multitudes of baptisms performed every day that are useless and make the recipients thereof "twofold more the child of hell" because they have been taught false doctrine or their baptism is not Scriptural.

It seems to me you are judging things concerning me about which you have no knowledge. Seems like the Lord forbid that somewhere (cf. Matt. 7:1-5). You are assuming and jumping to conclusions. You have no idea what I (we) do from day to day, week to week, etc. The work we do with "Seek The Old Paths" is only a part of our work. Since we believe strongly in being balanced, we cannot leave it off and be justified before the Lord. I'm sure glad I answer to Jesus and not men. He knows all, men do not.

Do you believe men can know the Truth, and know that they know the Truth?

READER'S COMMENT:

Do I believe that men can know the Truth, and know that they know the Truth? Talk about a loaded question. Can man fathom the mind of Christ? I have to respond that only when we are standing at his throne in heaven and have been made complete can I answer yes.

I am weary of "the Old Path." The conservative legalistic approach works for you and I am sorry. I have just taken a step past that into a personal relationship with the Lord and hate to see anyone struggle with the yoke. We ought not hang out our dirty laundry for the public to see.

When you are really "down and out," does the Law of God (the Bible) sooth you? No. You strive to hear God. God's Spirit comes in and soothes your heart. Words like Truth, Obedience, Denominationalism, Non-Instrumental music, etc., don't help.

ANSWER:

The question about knowing the

truth comes from John 8:31-32. Jesus plainly said, "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." I didn't intend for anything to be loaded about it. I wanted to simply emphasize the point that the Lord said we can know the truth. I (or anyone else) am not left to wonder who is right and who is wrong and that none of us will know who is saved and who is lost until judgment day. The Bible can be understood. It was written to be understood (Eph. 3:4). Of course, Peter said there are some things that are harder to understand (2 Peter 3:16). We are not falsely judging when we repeat what the Lord said and recognize the application of what he said. He made the judgment, we simply accept it. Therefore, I (and you) can see what one does and know whether that complies with what the Lord said.

I do not relish exposing false teachers who are brethren. I wish it were not necessary. But again, the Lord said to expose (Eph. 5:11; Rom. 16:17), and so I do it (even when I don't enjoy it). I personally do not like for the public to know members of the Lord's church have problems from within. However, they know we're human and not all humans are completely devoted to righteousness and truth as the Lord commands. Some (many) will turn away from the Lord's Way (his Word) because they have no sincere interest in the truth (John 6:66-67). On the other hand, some will see that we are willing to deal with error and handle it instead of sweeping it under the rug and pretending it doesn't exist among us.

I see that people often misapply so-called "legalism." It appears that you think that everyone who loves the truth and willing to stand on it is a legalist. Is it legalism to believe that people who do not genuinely believe and are baptized will be lost (Mark 16:16)? I contend it is not legalism to obey the Lord. It is not legalism to follow the Word of God by rightly dividing the truth and making proper application. By the way, I'd rather be legal than illegal. Hadn't you? Just what do you mean by "legalism?" Would you please define that? Without adherence to the Word of God, it is not possible to be right (relationship) with the Lord (John

15:14; 1 John 2:3). How in the world am I going to explain to the Lord that I'd rather skip and ignore his Word, go beyond that, and have a personal relationship with him? The ONLY way we know salvation is by obeying his Word (Matt. 7:21; Heb. 5:9). First John 5:3 clearly says the love of God is keeping his commandments and his commandments are not grievous. They are not burdensome. They are not legalistic. They are not a yoke around our neck. Faithful servants of God do not struggle with them. Where does such an idea come from?

I don't know anything about a conservative, legalistic approach. All I know is what the Lord said. Personally, I may not like everything he said. But, I don't have a right to my own belief. He did not ask me what I thought about it. He simply tells us what is right and we have to accept it. I did not write the Bible. I don't have a right to dismiss what I don't like. We are not going through the "dinner line" at a kitchen where we can pick and choose what we like or what works best for me or what suits my personality. The Truth is the Truth for everybody. We either accept it, live by it and are saved or reject it and remain lost. When we reject it, there's no other Word from the Lord. There is no other option to be saved.

I'm not weary of following the

Lord. That is synonymous with following the old paths. The only way we can follow the Lord is by following his Word. There is no other way of communication from Jesus but by and through his Word. His way is the old way. It's only old in the sense that he is its author. He gave his word like he wanted it. No man has any right to change it or dismiss it. Everyone must follow his word, his rule, his law. I know people don't like his law — they don't like his rules — but it is his law that will one day judge us (John 12:48; Rev. 20:12). It's the standard to which all must adhere or they will never be saved.

The Lord's law was fervently preached by Jeremiah. He pleaded with people to seek and follow the "old paths" (God's law), but they refused (Jer. 6:16-17), just like many refuse today. The people of Malachi's day thought following the old paths was a weariness (Malachi 1:13). They thought it was drudgery. They were tired of it. They thought they had grown beyond obedience to the will of God. How in the world can it be wrong to follow the Lord's Way, his Word, his Law, his Commandments, his old paths? Why would people turn away from Jesus? When one turns away from Jesus' law (word, old paths), they are turning away from Jesus. You can't have Jesus without

his law (John 15:14; 14:15). You can't have Jesus without his church (he is the savior of it, Eph. 5:23). You can't have the peace that passeth all understanding (Phil. 4:7) without the Lord's old paths, his word (Phil. 4:9; Acts 10:36-37; Acts 11:14). His word brings peace, but only when we have obeyed his will. Peace with God comes after being justified by faith (Rom. 5:1), but faith comes by hearing God's word (Rom. 10:17). You can't get away from the Lord's way, law, commandments, old paths. We wouldn't even know about salvation except the old paths telling us about it. The old paths is the Gospel of peace (Rom. 10:15; Eph. 6:15). How can you say you're weary of the old paths? Are you weary of the Lord's will, his word, his way, his love?

The old paths brings comfort and peace. How else could we possibly know of God's love, his care, and forgiveness without his word telling us so? All that we know of the Lord, God, Holy Spirit, etc. etc. comes by and through the old paths. The Psalmist received comfort through the word of God (Psa. 119:50, 76). Peace and comfort comes through the holy Scriptures, the old paths (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 14:3).

I pray these words have helped you in your study. Therefore, love the truth (cf. Zech. 8:19).

IS CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN MUSIC SCRIPTURAL?

Adam B. Cozort

Contemporary Christian music is becoming more and more of an issue among members of the church today, and it's not just among young people. There are many adults who also listen to this music and see nothing wrong with it. What I would like to do is search for biblical authority to either support or deny the fact that such "Christian" music is scriptural.

First, let us look at the passages most frequently used in matters concerning singing. Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 are verses that are the first to come out in almost any

discussion on matters of song and singing. When we look at the context of both of these passages we see that it not only applies to a worship setting but outside of that setting as well. As a matter of fact, the text never even specifically uses terms applying to a worship service. Though these are most definitely valid passages to use in reference to singing in the worship service, there is nothing in the passages to bind that to the worship setting alone. Though these passages are good and can be used on this topic, we must not use these passages alone as our

basis for consideration.

We need to always keep in remembrance what Paul said in Colossians 3:17, "*And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus...*" If we are to use God's name, it should be in praise to Him. God told Moses in Exodus 20:7, "*Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.*" If we are not using God's name to His glory, then is it not vain? I have had friends tell me concerning "Christian" music, "It's better than anything else that is out there." But is it? Granted, it may not have the obscene language, or the

immoral lyrics, but if we are using God's name improperly, is it really any different?

First Corinthians 6:20 says, "*For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.*" If we have given ourselves to God, then shouldn't we do what he has commanded us?

In almost every instance, these "Christian" music groups will tell that they use their songs to worship God. Even if that is the case, they are not worshiping God the way God commanded us to worship Him. As we have already noticed, God has commanded us to sing, not to sit and listen to a band (Eph. 5:19). By listening to such music would we not be consenting to their activities? What is the difference between listening to this music, and going out to a "gospel" concert put on by denominations and listening to their groups "worshipping" God?

One purpose of Contemporary Christian Music is to entertain. I

recently saw a television ad for one of their radio stations whose motto was, "No preaching. No teaching. Just good Christian music." If there is not teaching or preaching, then what else does that leave besides entertainment? The purpose of worship is not to entertain each other, but to give praise to the real audience in our worship, our Father in Heaven. If we are working toward entertaining the people in the pews, then we have forgotten who is the audience in our worship, and whose acceptance we are seeking by our worship. I would also say that they evidently haven't understood Colossians 3:16, which states that we are to "teach and admonish one another" with our songs. There is nothing in that verse nor any of the others that we have looked at that says anything concerning entertaining each other. There is one explicit reason for this. Our own entertainment is not the reason we are to worship. It is to be for the glory of Him that created us and sent His Son that we might be

saved. They are in fact teaching even if they won't admit it.

If we want to worship God, and be right in His sight, we must follow His commands and examples as He has given them to us. Remember what Christ said in John 4:24, "*God is a spirit, and they that worship Him, must worship Him in spirit and in truth.*"

Is contemporary Christian music scriptural? The answer is a resounding "NO!" There is no place for man's entertainment in our praise to God. God has shown us how He wants us to praise Him. James 5:13 says, "*...is any merry? Let him sing psalms*" (ASV praises).

God has truly given us "*...all things that pertain unto life and godliness*" (2 Peter 1:3). If we are willing to follow those things which He has given us, we will never have to wonder if we have been pleasing in the eyes of our Lord.

844 18th St.
Calera, AL 35040

“Defenses”

(Continued from page 73)

only one "way" of salvation (Acts 9:2; 16:17; 19:9,23). Note also the wording of 2 Peter 2:2,15 in which we read of "the way of truth" and "the right way." Who is it that told us there is one way of truth — the one right way? God Himself.

No, there are not many roads that will take one to heaven. The road to heaven is through Jesus the Christ, the Gospel of Christ, the church of Christ (Eph. 3:6).

4) "*Jesus taught that He is the vine and different denominations are the branches*" (John 15:5).

Answer: Yes, Jesus did say, "I am the vine, and ye are the branches." But where in the context of John 15 do we read about "denominations?" Neither the word itself nor the concept of denominations is within 260 chapters (the number of chapters in the New Testament) of Jesus' statement!

Jesus said in verse six, "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch...." Jesus said "man" and "he," not a "denomination." Besides that,

Jesus was speaking to and about individual disciples, not denominations: "without me ye can do nothing" (15:5).

There were no denominations in existence at the time Jesus made this statement, so He could not have been talking to them or about them. Jesus was speaking about those that are "in" Him. Denominations are not in Christ. Thus, John 15, like all the other arguments we have considered, gives no support for the existence of even a single denomination.

5) "*Paul said there is one body with many members* (1 Cor. 12:20). *The 'members' are the various denominations of our day.*"

Answer: The context clearly shows who these "members" are. Compare what is said in verse 27, it shows that "ye," i.e., those to whom Paul was writing, were "members in particular" (members individually). The question then becomes: "To whom was Paul writing?" Answer: The church of God in Corinth (1:2). Thus, the "members" of 12:20 were the individual members of the church.

Romans 12:4-6 also makes it plain that the "many members" are

individual saints. In that passage Paul writes of "we" and "us." To whom was Paul writing? Answer: To "saints" in Rome (1:7), not denominations. Paul could not have been referring to modern denominations because none existed at the time he wrote this epistle.

6) "*How could so many intelligent, well-educated people that are part of and support denominationalism all be wrong? Look at all the good commentaries such people have written. They can't all be wrong.*"

Answer: It truly is perplexing that "intelligent, well-educated people" can be deceived, but they can. Saul of Tarsus was certainly well educated, but he was sincerely wrong in his religious activities.

Throughout history, many "intelligent, well-educated people" have been drawn into inappropriate activities or teachings. Consider the Germans that followed Hitler, the professors at Harvard and elsewhere who declare that godless evolution is the right explanation of man's origin, or the millions that do not even believe in Jesus as the Son of God.

Make no mistake about it. Satan is able to deceive great multitudes

because he is so slick, causing his servants to appear to be the ministers of righteousness (2 Cor. 11:13-15). We must be careful and not use the actions of mere human beings to try and establish what is right or wrong in God's sight. Man's wisdom cannot stand up to God's (1 Cor. 1:25; 3:19).

There are other arguments that people use to try and defend denominationalism. We have considered six of the "big" ones, and found they all have one thing in common: they are all lacking in proof! Friends, the Bible gives absolutely no support to the existence of any denomination.

The Lord Jesus said, "Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up" (Matt. 15:13). May God help us to see this truth and boldly declare it to those who are mired in the doctrines and organizations of men.

4865 Bates Pike SE
Cleveland, TN 37323

CONTRIBUTIONS

Chuck Verkist.....	\$50
Shelton Creed.....	\$10
John H. Brown.....	\$25
Martin Bedford.....	\$150
South Middleton Church of Christ, Middleton, TN.....	\$100
Marvin & Judy Gearhart.....	\$150
Harold E. Wood.....	\$25
Ernest Bentley.....	\$50
Anonymous.....	\$160
Anonymous.....	\$60
Anonymous.....	\$210
Marvene Tucker.....	\$25
Lewis Bond, Jr.....	\$50
Oak Ridge Church of Christ, Obion, TN.....	\$100
Anonymous.....	\$30
A. H. Kenamer.....	\$50

BOOKLET MAKER

Anonymous.....	\$100
Ronald H. Allen.....	\$30
Robert Price.....	\$200

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POLITICALLY OR BIBLICALLY CORRECT?

Steven D. Cline

While listening to the news some time ago, I learned that the Crayola Crayon Company no longer feels the name of one of its colors, "Indian Red," is appropriate, being afraid that the title may be offensive. The company wants to be "politically correct" and is going to change the name. It is the third time in the crayon company's history this has been done. In the early 1960's "Flesh" became "Peach" and prior to that, the name "Prussian Blue" was changed because school children were ignorant as to whom the Prussians were.

Today, we are inundated with the term "politically correct" and with the concept being such, we are being conditioned to "tread on eggshells" as it were, lest we hurt someone's sensitive feelings with our lack of amenities. Our society is getting to the point where we are afraid to say or speak something that may be taken as derogatory. We are told that, in this age of permissiveness and liberal enlightenment, we must not be offensive to anyone. Politically incorrect people are thought, by the New Age intelligentsia, to be crude, uncouth and socially unacceptable in their primitive Neanderthal blabbering. Of course, the politically correct people themselves have finesse, aplomb and social grace. They are quite the discriminating, refined and cultured souls. (Dear me, I hope I have not upset the humanists. I should have been politically correct and refrained from using the word "souls," something the humanists do not believe in).

But what is political correctness? It's merely an attitude of mind that is constantly changing depending on the general mood of the populace and the tenor of the time in which one lives. It is pragmatic (i.e., whatever works for a given situation), relative and subjective. What is politically correct now may not be in the future. Something that is welcome now may not be at a later time and visa versa. Political correctness is as unstable as

water and as shifting as the desert dunes.

There are those in the Bible whose language would not be considered acceptable to the ones who are so adamant in being politically correct. Jesus was not being politically correct when He referred to Herod as a "fox" (Luke 13:31-32), when he called the scribes and Pharisees "hypocrites" (Matt. 23:13ff) and when he warned of false prophets (Matt. 5:15). (Didn't Jesus know these disparaging remarks could lead to hurt feelings and a lowered sense of self-esteem in the ones He spoke of?) Paul was not being politically correct when he withstood Peter to the face in Galatians 2:11. John the Baptist was by far too politically incorrect for the delicate sensitivities of the more genteel politically correct elite, in his harsh and untactful habit of calling people vipers (Matt. 3:7), and John the Apostle called a church troublemaker, Diotrephes, by name, which would cause the politically correct proponent to gasp in horror... "mustn't do that, John. Diotrephes has feelings you know...okay the Golden Rule, John...live and let live." Not only that, but all four, Jesus, Paul, the Immerser and the Apostle John taught on and warned of Hell...a very politically incorrect subject if ever there was one!

The Gospel preachers in the early church and the staunch Old Testament prophets were not afraid of the people to whom they preached (Acts 20:22-24; Jer. 1:8). Their sermons, whether positive or negative, always had a positive goal (i.e. to save souls). Whether the listeners appreciated it or not, the message was always for their own good and never for their detriment. But so many today, including preachers, have been intimidated and/or influenced by the politically correct crowd insomuch that they modify their words so not to sound so crass. Therefore, a whore (Prov. 23:27) or a harlot (1 Cor. 6:15) becomes a "lady of the night," "call-girl," or "playmate of the

month." A soothsayer (Joshua 13:22) is now a "trans-channeler." A sodomite (Deut. 23:17) has become a "gay." Lying is "fibbing." Pornography is "art for the discriminating adult" and fornication is now a "trial marriage...the new morality," "living together," or "common law marriage." Adultery is seldom called that any more (except from behind a faithful pulpit or in a divorce court). Now it is "an extra-marital affair." Cold-blooded murder of the unborn is called "abortion," or to make it even more conscience-salving, a "terminated pregnancy." Drunkards are now known as "problem drinkers." The one true living Jehovah God is often referred to as "The Force" or a "Higher Power" in order to accommodate the ones who do not believe in Him. To appease the Feminists, God is often called "She" or "Mother." Some liberal, social gospel, brotherhood of man denominations do not see militant Christian hymns such as

"Onward Christian Soldiers" as politically correct, so they were removed from the song books. (Jesus is the "Prince of Peace" so "war-mongering" songs must be eliminated, you see).

This politically correct influence is even rife among certain members of the church. In the minds of some, it was not politically correct to have copies of the bold and uncompromising speech by H. Leo Boles, "*The Way of Unity Between the Christian Church and Churches of Christ*" at the 1984 Summit in Joplin, MO. It was said that brother Boles' language was "abusive and crude" and that his tracts would not "be in the best interests of the meeting." No wonder! The "Summit" was held right on the Christian Church's own "turf" — the Ozark Bible College. Some have apologized to the Christian Church for the likes of Lipscomb and McGarvey. Apparently it is not politically correct to esteem these valiant old stalwarts of the faith any

longer as faithful Gospel preachers. And, decades before the term "politically correct" came into vogue, the concept was alive and well. Witness for instance when the Firm Foundation, under the editorship of brother Showalter, refused to print the powerfully pointed articles of the inimitable J. D. Tant just because some readers found him coming on too strong for their tastes.

While Christians should never purposely be offensive to anyone, while we should never try to alienate anyone (2 Tim. 2:24-26), let us remember that we are still to please God and not man (Gal. 1:10), and we need to speak the oracles of God (1 Peter 4:11), being Biblically correct rather than Politically correct.

PO Box 140214,
Nashville, TN 37214
Seibles Road Church of Christ
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THE MUZZLING OF SIN

Bob Spurlin

Too many today are more concerned about their carnal appetites, the loafs and fishes, the fun and games provided by the church, than the spiritual food that is available (Matt. 5:6). Fellowship with God by incorporating entertainment, trivial matters, or other frivolous interests into the church will cut us off from God.

This writer has preached the Gospel for three decades and has seen, heard, and observed many things that shook me to the very core. Disabled for several years now has given me time for serious reflection. Many preachers are confronted with serious matters of sin while working with the local church. Suddenly they inform him, "Just say nothing about the adultery, social drinking, gambling, the use of drugs and tobacco etc., and in time it will go away." Those who advance the idea of ignoring sin or sticking one's head in the sand is foreign to the teaching of the Bible (1 Tim. 5:20; 2 Tim. 4:2). Multiple preachers have faced the dilemma of being muzzled by brethren. To keep silent about sin, in all its variations, will not make one a

faithful minister. All too often influential brethren would do what they could and use the means at their command to muzzle preachers and others from shining the light on wrong doing (Psalm 119:105). We need to always ask the question, "is it from God or Satan?" It does not take a Solomon to evaluate the matter to decide the answer. God's real servants must never close their mouths when Satan parades before the world spouting error while brethren tolerate it as Gospel (Gal. 1:8-9).

1. *We see the muzzling of sin when we sanction fornication to exist in the church.* This writer remembers hearing a preacher say, "I cannot preach on marriage, divorce, and remarriage, because we would lose half our congregation." Some preach-

ers are muzzled as sin runs rampant when they are faced with the dilemma of losing their job, big pay check, and fancy home. The professional preacher has been the outgrowth of this muzzling of sin. Too many preachers have been transformed into professional preachers, those who do what they have to do in maintaining their job. Far too many congregations are, unfortunately, served by those who look at preaching the Gospel as a job. Elders and preachers should take a stand for God's teaching on marriage, divorce, and remarriage (Matt. 19:3-9). Regardless if it is an elder's son/daughter, or someone else of prominence or notoriety in the congregation. Jesus said, "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). We

cannot muzzle sin to accommodate those who wish to be practitioners of fornication or other sin. Peter and the other apostles were not professional preachers, as they replied to the council of the Jews, “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

2. *We see the muzzling of sin when they allow rebels to go unchecked in the church.* Rebels are agitators, troublesome, and will revolt against the leadership of the church. Rebels are hecklers, dissenters, and are disorderly to the paths of righteousness, which is sinful (Rom. 1:17; 2 Thess. 3:6). The prophets of God exhorted the children of Israel repeatedly not to rebel against God. Moses penned the following words, “Only rebel not against the Lord...” (Num. 14:9). Rebellion is a serious sin that causes extreme consequences to those who practice such. Korah, Dathan, Abiram, the two-hundred-fifty princes, and others of renown were guilty of rebellion when they questioned the authority of Moses and Aaron (Num. 16:1-3). The Lord God through Moses, the following day, instructed the congregation of Israel to separate themselves from the tents of Korah and his band of rebels. God consumed the group of rebels with fire as the earth swallowed them (Num. 16:30-33). The Lord did not muzzle the sin of rebellion, conversely he showed unequivocally how he felt about such a sin. Is rebellion any less serious, or perilous to the church today as it was during the day of Moses?

Acts 5:1-11 reveals a compelling example of two rebels, Ananias and Sapphira, who lied concerning the contribution they made to help the poor. Peter said unto them, “...thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God” (Acts 5:4). Consequently, God struck Ananias and Sapphira dead for their act of rebellion. Rebels come in different forms and manifest their deeds in many diverse ways. Rebellion by those against the doctrine of Christ, is seen with great clarity as these rebels attempt to lead the congregation away from the truth (2 John 9-11). Some yearn to be rebel rousers by distracting brethren from doing good and encouraging them to take an evil path. We have an example in Acts 13:4-12 when Elymas the sorcerer sought to thwart Paul from preaching the word to Sergius

Paulus. This rebel, or troublemaker, was struck with a season of blindness following Paul’s reprimand (Acts 13:10-12).

3. *We see the muzzling of sin when the church lowers the bar of fellowship.* A serious shift has been seen over the last decade or two regarding the doctrine of fellowship. This writer and preacher has seen a dramatic move from basic, fundamental preaching of the Gospel of Christ, to a reliance upon philosophy, ideology, and psychology. Twenty-five-years ago while driving down the highway and listening to a religious broadcast, one could differentiate the Gospel being preached from an imitation message of some sectarian. Within fifteen to twenty seconds one could instantly recognize the difference between the preaching of Christ and the perpetuating of error.

Today, unfortunately, this is untrue as the broadcasts from both sides have merged. Many of our brethren, through the medium of radio, cannot easily be identified due to the bland message and neutral position they assume. Fellowship with God is dependent upon our “walking in the light.” John penned these words, “but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). “Walking in the light” is the equivalent of abiding with, or subscribing to the doctrine of Christ, found in the New Testament (2 John 9). Some are promoting fellowship with sectarians by exchanging pulpits with them.

The progression of this act of heresy has incrementally taken place. Like any other error, it usually takes place over the slow, steady, passing of time. There has also been a deliberate softening toward the use of instrumental music in our worship services (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). Surveys have been taken by members of churches of Christ and the results have been quite shocking to say the least. Among other things the rank and file members do not believe it is sinful to see the introduction of the mechanical instrument in our worship services. Yet, we see the muzzling of sin when the church lowers the bar of fellowship as it relates to these matters. A glaring act of lowering the bar of fellowship, and muz-

zling sin is the widespread practice of integrating recreation into the church. A casual glancing of several weekly church bulletins will quickly attest to this basic practice. Many of us have said this is the exception and not the rule, however, the very opposite may be the case today.

Paul wrote the following, “for the kingdom of God is not eating or drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17). In all too many cases we have ignored the difference between the home and the church. The home is to provide the social and recreational aspect of the family development. The church, a spiritual institution, offers salvation, spiritual food, and exercise through Christ (Acts 20:32; 2:41,47).

Therefore, the church of the Lord is not in the entertainment business, nor does it have the responsibility to furnish recreation. The use of the Lord’s money to construct multimillion dollar Family Life Centers to tantalize and seduce Christians, especially young people, to play basketball, soccer, badminton, etc. blinds the church to its divine work. Jesus, in John chapter six, discovered that many people were following him only for the loaves and fishes. Jesus underscores the importance of spiritual food, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have not life in yourselves” (John 6:53). Many disciples when they heard these words said, “This is a hard saying, who can hear it” (John 6:60)? These disciples were stunned by such a message and reacted, “Upon this many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him” (John 6:66). Too many today are more concerned about their carnal appetites, the loafs and fishes, the fun and games provided by the church, than the spiritual food that is available (Matt. 5:6). Fellowship with God by incorporating entertainment, trivial matters, or other frivolous interests into the church will cut us off from God. Paul said, “Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Eph. 5:11). We must not muzzle sin unless we are willing to forfeit our relationship to God.

211 Glenwood Dr.
Hartselle, AL 53640

THE VALUE OF TRUTH!

“Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth” (Gal. 4:16)?

Some years ago I heard a Gospel preacher say he heard a younger preacher get up and preach a good sermon in a meeting; but, then ruined it by getting back up and apologizing for it. He was afraid of offending someone who still had their “milk teeth.”

In recent years I have heard what some call sermons in Gospel meetings that would not offend a member of the most liberal denomination. I went to one such meeting in Tennessee, and the man who led the first prayer had more Scripture in his prayer than the preacher had in his sermon. He was not a member of that congregation. Personally, I am not in favor of a lot of Scriptures in a prayer, but this man did; thus, about the only Bible heard was in that prayer. The truth is, “His sermons would not offend the devil.”

What premium do you place on Truth? When I speak of truth, I do not mean what some call truth; but, I mean “the truth of the Gospel” (Gal. 2:5,14). What are you willing to give up for truth? What price will you be willing to pay in this world for truth? The wise man wrote: “Buy the truth, and sell it not” (Prov. 23:23). Paul writes that some had become his enemy because he told them the truth (Gal. 4:16). Jesus was not crucified because he said: “Consider the lilies of the field,” but because he warned: “Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3).

Only God, who will reward all according to their deeds, knows how many preachers have been fired or mistreated so that they left to escape the wrath of the “milk drinkers.” And, the only reason was that they would not compromise the doctrine of Christ when it did not please some sharp tongued sister who tried to run the congregation through a son or son-in-law or husband. One such sister stated in a Bible class that the congregation there had never fired a preacher. I told her that it might be kinder to just go ahead and fire a preacher than to treat him in such a way that he takes his family away on his own. I stayed there three years and three months, which I was told was the record for longevity there. She was one of the few [along with her branch of the clan] who made life miserable for us, and thus contributing to our moving.

Are you willing to give up job security for truth? Will you break friendships, if necessary, when truth would otherwise be compromised. Paul was, and so must we if duty demands it. Are we willing to call a snake a snake? Are you willing to state the truth on divorce and remarriage? John was, but remember what it cost him! Are you strong enough in your stand for the truth of the Gospel to tell religious leaders they have transgressed the laws of God by their innovations and manmade laws? Jesus was, and even his disciples rebuked him by saying: “Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?” Jesus did not apologize because of truth that offended, but he did tell his disciples to leave the rejecters of truth alone with their damnable doctrines and deceived disciples.

Brethren, if some do not stand up and condemn innovations and manmade doctrines, the churches of Christ are heading for extinction in this county. Of course I will be considered to be judgmental, but in my judgment, there are probably no more than two congregations in this county who will stand for truth and oppose error. And, guess which two congregations in the county are among the smallest in attendance in the county? Right! Truth is costly! It cost faithful men their lives in New Testament times. It may not cost men their lives today, but it will often cost men their livelihoods. Large congregations who still stand for the Pattern, and who have Godly elders leading to heaven, are becoming rare indeed. Preachers and elders must not take their responsibilities lightly. As one preacher said: “A routin’ time is coming!”

Earl Gieseke
1927 Washington St.
Paducah, KY 42003

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