

Errors Heard from Those Who Have Left the Church

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Over the years there have been many who have abandoned the church of Christ. Some of those have left the church and gone into indifference if not total unbelief. There may be a greater number who have left and joined forces with the denominational world. There are several videos posted on YouTube by some of the people who give their excuses for leaving the body of Christ and have joined themselves to religious error. Following are a few of the ones I have heard.

They say churches of Christ claim there must be authority for everything one does in worship. It is not the churches of Christ who made that rule, God did. Colossians 3:16-17 demonstrate the mandate is set in stone. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." It is God who has said we must have authority for all we do in worship, not members of the church of Christ.

Often, those who have left the church accuse us of overemphasizing doctrine. Let them consider a truth. No one can overemphasize anything God requires of man. So far as doctrine is concerned, the New Testament warns us not to be carried about by every wind of doctrine (Eph. 4:14). In 1 Timothy 1:3, Paul reminds the younger preacher he left in Ephesus to charge some to teach no other doctrine. The apostle then lists some things contrary to sound doctrine (1 Tim. 1:4-10). In Romans, Paul expresses his joy those brethren

obeyed from the heart the doctrine delivered to them (Rom. 6:17). We all are to be nourished or brought up in the words of faith and good doctrine (1 Tim. 4:6). Paul further instructed Timothy that "Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" (1 Tim. 4:13). In the oft-quoted 2 Timothy 4:2-4, Paul charged Timothy to preach the Word in season and out of season. He was to reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all longsuffering, and what else? Doctrine! How important is doctrine? The apostle John states it clearly. "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" (2 John 9). Sound doctrine cannot be overemphasized.

Again, those who have left the church falsely accuse brethren of minimizing God's grace. What in the world do they think teaching and preaching concerning the cross of Christ are if not maximizing the grace of God? We are saved by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8-9). Salvation is a gift from God. Why? Because none of us can save ourselves. We are all guilty of sin (Rom. 3:23), the wages of which is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ our Lord (Rom. 6:23). We are not guilty of minimizing God's grace, but rather those who have left seem to have forgotten that the grace that brings salvation has appeared unto all men, but it does not save all men. Instead, it teaches us. God's grace teaches us how not to live and how to live (Tit. 2:11-15). How are we to live? As obedient children (1 Pet. 1:14-16). The point is grace and obedience to the doctrine of Christ cannot, they must not, be separated. Faithful members of the church are not guilty of minimizing grace. Rather, those who have left the church have decided to minimize obedience.

Concerning the matter of grace, some who have left the church claim focusing on striving for perfection puts down grace. If such be the case, the writer of Hebrews does the same thing. "Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ,

let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God" (Heb. 6:1). We are all weak and erring. Yes, all of us sin, but over and over the New Testament warns us to stay away from sin and do what is right. Jesus, Himself, said not to minimize obedience. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate" (Luke 13:24). Strive refers to a struggle, to contend for a prize with difficulties standing constantly in our way. Our English word agonize is a transliteration of the Greek word translated "strive" in the King James. The claim that focusing on striving for perfection puts down grace is the opinion of some, but an opinion is all it is. One wonders if such people are down on Paul who over and over, in Galatians 5, Colossians 3, and Ephesians 4, in particular, contrasts the life of the new man with the old man. Was Paul wrong to tell the Romans when one rises from the watery grave of baptism he is to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4)? Peter sums this point up well in 1 Peter 4:15-16: "But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf." The deserters who make this false charge against the faithful are the ones guilty of minimizing something. They minimize Scripture!

Many of those who leave the church claim it is a denomination among denominations. They tell us there are Christians scattered throughout the various churches of men. These are guilty of denying the oneness of the church. As in all the other excuses they appeal to, they ignore the Scripture. Jesus said He would (Mat. 16:18) and did (Acts 2:1...) build His church. There is only one body (Eph. 4:4) which is His church (Eph. 1:22-23). Therefore, there is only one church. The New Testament describes all things concerning that body including its worship, mission, and organization. In other words, the New Testament is the pattern for the church (Heb. 8:1-13). Paul instructed the Corinthians to speak the same things and

for there to be no divisions among them. The apostle sent Timothy to Corinth to remind them of the things Paul taught them, which were the exact same things he taught in every congregation (1 Cor. 4:17).

Those who have left the church and who now claim the church is one among many denominations need to consider Paul's writing to the Corinthians instructing both them and us to be of the same mind, to teach the same things, and for there to be no divisions among us (1 Cor. 1:10). If the deserters are right in their belief that there are Christians in the different denominations is right, and there are divisions in all of them regarding the matters Paul listed, we are all lost. If not, why not?

Departures from the unity of doctrine, practice, and manner of life are reasons the Scripture gives us the clear command to practice the withdrawal of fellowship. John wrote concerning some, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us" (1 John 2:19). Many of those who went out from us have proven themselves to have never really been one of us.

From the various ones I have heard speak who left the church at some point in their lives, I have concluded three things regarding their thinking. First, they have the wrong idea that we are full of arrogance when we insist that we can absolutely know the truth. What an attack that makes against Jesus Himself, Who said, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth, shall make you free" (John 8:32).

The second thing is they have abandoned the necessity of being obedient in all things. Their condition is sad in that Paul wrote, "For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things (2 Cor. 2:9).

Third, they seem to have bought into the popular Calvinist error of once saved always saved. If so, they need to return to the Scriptures and meditate on passages such as 2 Peter 2:20: "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning."

Jesus died for and built one church, His church. He did not die for the denominations of men, the various community churches popping up all over the country, nor for those in the various world religions who do not honor the God of the Bible nor esteem Jesus as His only begotten Son. No one outside the church of Christ will be saved regardless of whether they have never been members of it or if they have gone out from us.