

# Errors Heard from Those Who Have Left the Church

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Defender – July, 2021

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.

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# The Demand for Positive Preaching

Dub McClish

Beacon – February 24, 2014

More and more over the past few years the cry for “positive” preaching has been heard. Surely, preachers need to preach positively in the sense that we offer something that is solid and concrete when we get up to preach. Any fool can raise questions and broadcast his own uncertainties. However, we have a certified Gospel (Gal. 1:11) based upon the “word of prophecy made more sure” (2 Pet. 1:19). The Gospel of Christ is “in truth, the word of God” (1 Thes. 2:13). The task of Gospel preachers is to preach this sure and certain truth and to be positive about it! In the Gospel, we have something to

offer the world that it cannot get anywhere else, and we must unashamedly offer it. True Gospel preaching will always accentuate the “pluses” of Gospel obedience and Christian living which ends in eternal life.

However, I have found that most folk who insist on “positive” preaching have something else in mind. They usually mean: “Don’t preach on specific sins”; “Don’t preach on the necessity of baptism”; “Don’t preach about the one church”; “Don’t expose religious error and call it by name”; etc. (Is it not strange how negative these folks are who demand “positive” preaching?) To this growing element within the church “positive” preaching not only excludes such things as the above but it focuses almost entirely on grace, love, mercy, and joy as they understand them. Surely, none can deny that, properly conceived, these are important themes of the Gospel, and they dare not be neglected. But I deny that these are the only important subjects of the Gospel. “Godly sorrow,” for example is necessary to produce salvation (2 Cor. 7:10).

The “positive” approach represents the encroachment of the false philosophy that all guilt feelings are harmful. Those thus persuaded will not long tolerate preaching that makes them feel guilty. Many in the church now want to do their drinking and dancing, go on living in their adulterous marriages, wear immodest clothing in public, forsake the assembly at will, etc., and never be called in question. If the preacher does not send them from the assembly “feeling good” he has wasted their time! To such, one who dares to continue preaching the whole counsel of God is “negative” and “offensive.” Straightforward preaching that identifies sin and error is “arrogant” preaching and constitutes “an unbalanced gospel” to them.

I challenge such brethren to apply their standards of “positive” preaching to our Lord. He repeatedly rebuked the sins and sinners of His day in scathing words (Mat. 6:1-18; 11:16-24; 12:34, 39; 15:1-20; 23:1-29; etc.). This often

involved calling the name of their party and naming their sins. Our Lord had more to say about the judgment, eternal condemnation, and the wrath of God than He did about some of the more "positive" themes craved by some brethren. By their standards, our Lord was an "unloving," "offensive," "negative," even "unbalanced" preacher! Judging by the shameful way some brethren treat faithful preachers, Jesus and His apostles would be chased from numerous pulpits, were they on earth today.

Some get far more excited about how "dynamic" a speaker may be than how Scriptural his sermon is. They want a preacher who can draw the crowds, often with little concern for what he draws them with. Such people have either never learned, or have chosen to ignore, the characteristics of New Testament preachers and their message. Gospel preaching was decisive and demanded a decision of its listeners. It was distinctive preaching that drew plain lines between the kingdoms of darkness and light, between righteousness and worldliness, between truth and error. It was bold preaching that openly challenged the morally and spiritually bankrupt philosophies of the time. But that kind of distinctive, plain, yet loving preaching that swept the first century world and swept our young nation 150 years ago is unappreciated by many today.

A non-convicting type of preaching provides only superficial healing for the deep needs of the soul. I am interested in saving souls. Can I do this by withholding part of the Word from them, by making them "feel good" when they need to be convicted of sin, by being so careful not to offend that they never see a distinction between truth and error through my preaching? R. N. Hogan was right: "There has been so much sweet-talk preaching that a lot of the saints have spiritual sugar diabetes." A generation raised on this kind of super-sweet, entertainment-oriented preaching has left many a church spiritually malnourished and unfamiliar with the meat of the Gospel. This is why scores of our congregations are on the

brink of losing their identity and of lapsing into full-scale denominationalism.

The numerical and spiritual strength of the church today has not been gained through a compromising, non-disturbing message but through fearless preaching of the distinctive Gospel. It is no mere coincidence that our rapid growth rate in the first half of the century began to decline about the same time that the cry for "positive," "non-offensive" preaching began to be raised. Today's soft, promotional type of preaching is destroying the generation has grown up on it. Unless there is an awakening to what is happening, those of us who are determined to preach and follow the truth may soon find ourselves starting all over again in homes and rented halls as the apostasy of a century ago required. It is already occurring in some communities.

With Micaiah of old, let us preachers have the wisdom and courage to say, even to those in "high places" who seek to silence us, "As Jehovah liveth, what my God saith, that will I speak" (2 Chr. 18:13). And let us have godly men and women who will support faithful preaching by asking for "the old paths, where is the good way" (Jer. 6:16). In such a restoration alone is the solution to the problems of false doctrine and immorality that are so prevalent in the churches!

Denton, TX

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# **The Authority of the Scripture Concerning Worship**

Jerry Moffitt  
September 1990



We have always been a people who made the Word of God our authority in religion. However, since there are signs in our brotherhood of drifting from this mooring, let us express two propositions regarding why God's Word, revealed in the Bible must be our sole authority in worship.

## **Proposition One: All Else Is Rejected as Authority**

First, the church cannot be our authority for it did not give us the truth. Rather, truth gave us the church. The church must support the truth and be the pillar and ground of it. Paul wrote to Timothy: "But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15).

Second, we reject denominations and ecclesiastical bodies as authority. They are not from heaven, but from man (Mat. 21:25). They are evil plants the Lord wants rooted up (Mat. 15:13).

Third, we reject human reason as authority. God has made it foolish (1 Cor. 1:18-31), so the way of man is not in himself (Jer. 10:23). Under this category we would place traditions of men (Mat. 15:7-9), human philosophy (Col. 2:8), secret knowledge (1 Tim. 6:20-21), and all men as an authority. Men can be false teachers (2 John 9-11; 1 John 4:1; 2 Pet. 2:13; Jude 3-4).

Fourth, we reject angels (Gal. 1:8-9; 2 Cor. 11:13-15), and human experiences (Mat. 24:24; 2 Cor. 3:13) as authority concerning worship. It is possible for us to be deceived, especially in the realm of human experience.

# Proposition Two: Why Scripture Is Our Sole Authority

First, only it is the Word of God (Deut. 8:3; 1 Thes. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Mat. 4:4). No other book, than the Bible, can stand tests intended to discredit this claim.

Second, it is in the Bible that God exercises His authority (1 Cor. 14:37; 2 Thes. 2:1-3; John 14:16-18; John 14:26; John 16:13; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). God had authority and delegated it to the Son (Heb. 1:1-3). The Son put it in men (2 Cor. 5:20), and they wrote it down (1 Cor. 14:37; 2 Thes. 2:1-3).

Thus, third, the Bible claims to be an authority (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Thes. 1:7-9; 2 Pet. 3:5). As a church, we dare not sail off the map of God's Word.

Fourth, Jesus appealed to Scripture as the final authority to settle religious concerns (Mat. 22:28-33; Mat. 19:4-5; John 10:35-36). The apostles did the same, quoting Old Testament passages to authenticate their teaching.

Like the Hebrews writer, time fails if we try to tell all. Scripture is our authority for it is reliable; it will judge us; and, it is indestructible. It will convert us (Psa. 19:7), guide us (Psa. 73:24), cleanse us (John 15:3), save us (James 1:21), sanctify us (John 17:17), edify us (Acts 20:32), and work in us (1 Thes. 2:13). What else could we ask? So may we continue to hold it up as our sole authority in Christianity.

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# Are We to Judge?

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January 2013

Every false teacher and every one whose behavior is sinful tries to hide behind Matthew 7:1-4, actually behind a partial quotation and a misapplication of these verses. When these verses are cited by these workers of evil, usually all that is stated is: "Judge not." In short, they say that any sort of criticism is contrary to God's Word because Christ here condemned all judging. The only thing wrong with this is that it is totally self-contradictory and totally false.

First, as with many false doctrines it is self-contradictory. Here stand the false teachers and the impenitent sinners stating that all criticism is sinful, and yet they seem not to realize that they are self-condemned by the very principle that they advocate. They criticize and condemn those who would criticize or condemn them. They violate the very principle that they advocate. This is not unusual. Those who violate God's Word try desperately to avoid the condemnation of that Word by seeing a different application and interpretation of that Word when it comes to themselves. Paraphrasing Peter in 2 Peter 3:16, these false teachers and sinful "wrest" this Scripture and others to their own destruction.

Second, neither the text before us, its context, or any other Scripture teaches what they want. The Lord does not condemn all judging either here or elsewhere in Scripture. It should be obvious from the text itself that Jesus here has a special kind of judgment under consideration which He condemns. Jesus describes this judgment as coming from someone who is in a worse condition than the one he condemns. Using the terminology found in the New King James Version, the one condemned has a "speck" in his eye while the one who is doing the condemning has a "plank" in his own eye. The Lord condemns

the person who is unconcerned about his own sin while being more than eager to point out and condemn the sin in others. The Lord here condemns the judging done by the hypocrite and the double standard of hypocrisy. The self-righteous hypocrite is wrong because he magnifies the sin of others while ignoring the glaring sins of his own life.

Notice the verse which follows our text: "Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye" (Mat. 7:5). In this statement, Jesus makes it clear that He is not condemning all judging for in this verse He tells us what we must do regarding the sin we observe in the lives of those around us. Jesus says that we must first deal with our own sin, and then we will be able to see clearly enough to help others rid themselves of sin. The lesson before us is: sin must be dealt with in our own lives before we can help others deal with their sins. Do not ignore our own sins and then concentrate on the sin of others. The same standard, God's Word, applies to all.

In Romans 2:1, Paul calls attention to this same sin among the Jews which Jesus identified and condemned in Matthew 7. "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things."

Further, Paul admonishes the "spiritual" who see a brother overtaken and overcome in sin to look to themselves when trying to bring the sinner back to faithfulness (Gal. 6:1). Sin in the lives of others should not be ignored. The presence of sin unrepented of brings death (Rom. 5:12). Recognizing sin and its consequence is necessary to obey the instructions of Galatians 6:1. In other words, judging is required to obey this passage. Yet again, those that obey this command are cautioned not to overlook their own sin and/or ignore it, "considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted."

Looking again at Matthew 7, notice that Jesus in this very context rather than condemning all judgment required judgment of those who would obey Him. For example, He commands, "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you" (Mat. 7:6). Jesus is not talking here about literal dogs and swine. The pearls to which He refers are not literal. He is teaching us that we need to discern (i.e., distinguish, or judge, between those who will recognize the worth of the Word of God and those who will reject it, abuse it, and try to destroy it). To obey this command we must be able to judge others so we can tell who are the "dogs" and "swine."

Jesus also warns us about false prophets in this same chapter of Matthew. "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Mat. 7:15). We must, therefore, be able to discern who these false teachers are. Jesus tells us how to make this judgment when He said, "Ye shall know them by their fruits" (Mat. 7:16). In this passage judgment is far from condemned; it is absolutely necessary!

As we expand our view of God's Word to include the remote context of Matthew 7:1-4 we observe that judging is again required. Those who would have us believe that Jesus condemned all judgment would have Jesus contradicting Himself. In John 7:24 Jesus states, "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment." Note that in the latter part of this statement Jesus said, "judge righteous judgment." Righteous judgment is commanded. It is therefore not optional. If we obey Christ, we will judge righteous judgment. The judgment Jesus requires of us is not according to outward appearance; things are not always how they appear. The judgment Jesus requires is righteous; that is, according to God's Holy Word, the Divine Standard of right and wrong. "All thy commandments are righteousness" (Psa. 119:172).

Jesus commended the Ephesian church for their ability to make judgments regarding who were and who were not apostles. He said of them, "thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars" (Rev. 2:2). Jesus would not have commended them for what He previously had condemned. When Peter sinned, Paul rebuked him to his face (Gal. 2:11-14). This behavior on the part of Paul was the right thing for him to do. Nevertheless for this to be done necessitated judgment, the ability to know that what Peter had done was wrong. Peter's behavior was sinful, and Paul rightly condemned it. In his discussion with the Corinthian church regarding the fornicator in their midst, Paul poses the question: "Do not ye judge them that are within?" (1 Cor. 5:21). According to the way this question is stated the correct answer is: "Yes, we are to judge those that are within the church." The inspired solution for the sin in the congregation at Corinth required judging. Judgment was necessary to discern the sin and the sinner so they could be dealt with appropriately.

The truth is that Jesus does not condemn all judging in Matthew 7, or elsewhere. What is condemned is hypocritical, self-righteous judging that overlooks sin in one's own life and concentrates on the sin of others. When the Word of God is obeyed and taught, sin will be reprovved and rebuked and the way of righteousness will be commended. "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:2). Righteous judgment is necessary to recognize and expose sin and to recognize and obey the Truth. Try as some might to protect their sinful practices and doctrines by twisting the meaning of God's Word, one day we will all stand before God in judgment. All will be held accountable for their behavior according to the standard of God's Word (John 12:48). It behooves us all to begin now making the right application of that Word to our lives. When sin occurs in our lives we need to deal with it in the way that God tells us in His Word. When

others care enough about us that they condemn the sin that exists in our lives, we should be grateful and apply the remedy demanded by God's Word so we might be saved. Rather than looking for a way to avoid what God has said, we need to be willing to turn from our sin and obey God to have the forgiveness that He offers. Condemning those who would help us identify sin in our lives so we might remove it is foolish indeed. "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thes. 5:21). However, "He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, Even they both are abomination to the Lord" (Prov. 17:15). Someone has well written, "Refusing to warn a person about his sin is just as unloving as refusing to warn him about a serious disease he may have. A person who does not warn a friend about his sin cannot claim love as his motive." "When one runs to Matthew 7:1-5 to protect the false teacher and impenitent sinner in the body of Christ, he either does not understand the passage or he deliberately perverts it" (Dub McClish, The Edifier, June 14, 1984).

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