

The Scandal of the Church

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In worship, organization, work, and other features, the faithful churches of Christ in the first century and in the twenty-first century are one. This is that for which those who love Christ supremely live: to reproduce in their time the church as Jesus planned it and built it through His apostles. Jesus intends that we preach His saving Gospel—which has the church at its center—to all the world “EVEN UNTO THE END OF THE WORLD” (**Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16**). His Word is the seed of the kingdom (**Luke 13:3**), which seed will produce only the kingdom/church in every generation (**Galatians 6:7**). Those who deny the possibility (to say nothing of the desirability or necessity) of restoring the church to its original condition deny the explicit teaching and obligation of Scripture.

Despite our concern for the primitive pattern, there is one area where many otherwise dedicated brethren have chosen to follow human philosophy instead of inspired obligation and approved course of action. The “scandal of the church” is the general failure to obey New Testament doctrine concerning “church discipline.” About as close as some congregations come to this Divine mandate is to take some names off the membership list occasionally, often without even urging those removed to repent and be restored. Many churches do not even do this.

Consequently, many church directories are bloated with a sizeable percent age of names of those who have long been lost, for all practical purposes, to the cause of Christ. They attend worship rarely or never, they use none of their talents to serve Christ, and they contribute little or no money to support the Gospel. They live in the world and of the world, and their friends who know they claim to be “members of the church of Christ” mock the church because of their reprobate lives. Then there are those who may be at the church facilities “every time the doors are open” (perhaps an elder, deacon, or even the preacher), but they have imbibed some doctrinal error(s) that will cause them and those whom they influence to be lost. Many elderships over the past three or four decades have allowed unruly and immoral members and false teachers to do what they will without rebuke. In hundreds of congregations the thought of exercising discipline against impenitent brethren is never thought of, much less discussed.

Why is this so? Not because the commands or examples of Scripture are unclear. Emphatic demonstrations of both abound (e.g., **Matthew 18:15-17; Romans 16:17; I Corinthians 5:15; 2 Corinthians 2:5-9; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15; Titus 3:10; 2 John 9-11**). Why then do brethren ignore this responsibility? The general permissive attitude in society has affected many in the church. The threat of lawsuits against the church by those disciplined has made many elderships timid. Some say, “It will hurt the church because some will quit if we withdraw from brother or sister So- and-so.” Still others say, “We have no right to judge,” “It will do no good,” “It would be unloving,” and like statements. All such excuses demonstrate far more influence from human reason and fear than faith in God’s Word.

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For failure to obey the New Testament in this matter, hundreds of congregations languish in apostasy, having surrendered their very identity with the Lord's faithful people. They are little different from the world because so much of the world has crept into them. What may have started as a "LITTLE LEAVEN" has "LEAVENED THE WHOLE LUMP" (**1 Corinthians 5:6**). Their worldliness is undisturbed because the preaching is indistinct and non-offensive. They are little different from the denominations because they have eagerly joined them in their unscriptural practices and doctrines. Christ wants a pure bride (**Ephesians 5:25-27**), and He calls upon us to keep her pure through faithful preaching and practice, which is impossible apart from loving and caring discipline (**1 Corinthians 4:17; 2 Timothy 2:2**). When, oh when, will brethren clean up this scandal?