

Fellowshipping or Combating Error?

J. W. McGarvey is recognized as one of the outstanding Bible scholars of the restoration movement of the 1800's. He was in the prime of his life (1829-1912) when the controversy over the use of instrumental music in church worship divided brethren in this country. While McGarvey personally opposed instrumental music in church worship, history tells us that he tried to combat it by tolerating its practice. Nearing the end of his life, he gave the following assessment of this approach to dealing with error among brethren to a young preacher. It is worth repeating:

"You are on the right road, and whatever you do, don't let anyone persuade you that you can successfully combat error by fellowshipping it and going along with it. I have tried. I believed at the start that was the only way to do it. I've never held membership in a congregation that used instrumental music. I have, however, accepted invitations to preach without distinctions between churches that used it and churches that didn't. I've gone along with their papers and magazines and things of that sort. During all these years I have taught the truth as the New Testament teaches it to every young preacher who passed through the College of the Bible. Yet, I do not know of more than six of them who are preaching the truth today. It won't work."

The New Testament also teaches us "it won't work." Accommodation with error does not promote unity (Eph. 4:3-6). It promotes compromise, corrupting those who attempt to fellowship error (2 Cor. 6:14-18; 11:2-4). It produces the loss of fellowship with God as it causes one to partake in error (2 Jn. 9-11). Yet, brethren still try to use this approach with error today - the social gospel, divorce and remarriage, evolution, denominationalism and many more. It won't work today, either. Do not bury your head in the sand! Error will not go away! It must be opposed for the sake of truth and the salvation of our souls (Jude 3-4; Gal. 2:4-5)!

- by Joe R. Price

Are You Starving To Death?

Having local churches, having assemblies, and requiring specific things to be done in those assemblies was God's idea, not man's. And God warns us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together (Heb. 10:25). Christians who choose not to assemble with other Christians are lacking in spiritual appetite, defying God, sinning willfully, and depriving themselves of the benefits that God intended to be derived from those assemblies. They will not grow spiritually; they cannot grow spiritually; they will begin to starve their souls until they become spiritually dead. Some are slowly dying; others have long since died. Do not let this happen to you; do not choose a course of neglect that will ultimately lead to the starvation of your precious and immortal soul. Put Christ first.

- by Bill Crews

"Do You Think They Might Leave?"

From time to time, Christians in a local congregation may express concern that some fellow members are thinking about leaving. With a tone of worry, someone might ask, "*Do you think they might leave?*"

We're not referring here to those who move away due to job changes or family needs - those are understandable and often unavoidable. What we have in mind is the more troubling situation: when members, seemingly on a whim and without sufficient cause, choose to withdraw from the congregation and begin worshipping with another group in the same area.

Often, there are warning signs before this happens. The members in question may begin to grow distant. They may attend less frequently, seem disengaged, or stop participating in the life and work of the church. They may avoid conversations or association with others. These changes, while subtle at first, often point to deeper issues.

When Leaving Is Justified

First, let's be clear: there are times when leaving a local church is right, appropriate, and even necessary.

For example, if there is **doctrinal error** being taught or practiced - and sincere efforts to

correct it have been unsuccessful - then separating from that congregation may be the only faithful option (2 John 9-11).

Similarly, in cases involving **unrepented immorality**, if those involved refuse correction and the congregation fails to take appropriate disciplinary action, faithful Christians may need to leave rather than be complicit by association (Ephesians 5:11).

When Leaving Is Not the Answer

However, outside of such serious doctrinal or moral concerns - or apart from a physical relocation - leaving a congregation should not be the first or easiest option. In fact, it should be far down the list.

Members of a local body should feel a deep sense of commitment, responsibility, and loyalty to the work and to the people of the local church. We all should think of the many good deeds, encouragements, and spiritual investments others have made in our lives. That history should not be lightly set aside. The decision to leave often causes deep hurt and discouragement for those who remain. It can create confusion, division, and sadness in the church family.

Can you help make things better?

No congregation is perfect. Every church has its weaknesses and areas that need improvement – and even people who may be hard to get along with at times. But ask yourself: *Instead of leaving, can I stay and help?* Can I be part of the solution? Can I lovingly serve, encourage, and strengthen what is lacking?

In a world that often values convenience over commitment, the church should be different. God calls His people to love, bear with, and build up one another (Hebrews 10:24). Staying and working through challenges together is one way we demonstrate the unity and love Christ prayed for in His church (John 17:20–23). Let us all strive to be part of a church where people don't feel the need to leave, but where they are eager to stay, serve, and grow together.

- by Greg Gwin