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Bible House of Grace.**



God, through His Son Jesus, provides eternal grace for our failures and human limitations.

My Thoughts Concerning Alternative Ways of Doing Church.

(2013)

The Bible not only reveals God's eternal plans purposes and promises
But also shows how you can know God for yourself.

Teach it, don't demand it.

Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man. As to such I neither claim special knowledge or perfect understanding.

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My Thoughts Concerning Alternative Ways of Doing-Church.

INTRODUCTION: in our modern world of global communication no one has to go to church to learn about God or the Lord Jesus Christ (as they did years ago). This of course is because Bible knowledge is instantly available to anyone who has access to the internet. Since statistics show that doctrinal differences are the greatest cause of church division the focus of this testimony is focused upon the following questions: -

- Is our system of doing-church the best system for today?
- Why are there so many divisions amongst the body of Christ?
- Why do faithful Christians leave church?
- Is there any other way of doing church?

Most people's experience of the Spirit, in the majority of churches, is one of friendliness and warmth statistics show that the majority of faithful brothers and sisters leave a church because of a difference in theological interpretation of Scripture and not because of the congregation or the music.

Generally as Christians grow and become strong in their own faith many often find that their thinking expands beyond the borders of their own church or the church organization or religious institution they belong to (as it did with me) when this happens it causes a dilemma, because they desire to question and think for themselves, but under our system of doing-church this causes difficulty and in many cases often results in them separating from the church since they are seen by the oversight of some churches as being rebellious to those who are in leadership and authority of the church.

Christians in the majority of churches agree that to be saved to eternal life a sinner must understand the message of the cross and the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, they must believe that Jesus is the Son of God and their Saviour who died on the cross and rose again to his heavenly Fathers right hand side and will return again in glory.

Even though almost all Christians believe these fundamental truths, because of a difference in interpretation of other areas of theology there are multitudes of divisions within the body of Christ even though those who do divide have the same passion and heartfelt devotion toward God and His beloved Son the Lord Jesus Christ as those they have divided from.

This raises the following two questions: -

1. Why does it seem almost impossible for Christians who differ in theology not relevant to the salvation message to fellowship and worship with each other when both have an obvious devotion and belief toward the Lord Jesus Christ and the outward lifestyle of both clearly evidences their inward faith and passion for the Lord?
2. Is it right that Christian churches should be so dogmatic on every teaching that their particular church believes?
3. Since the Lord Jesus Christ is the foundation that all Christians' faith is built upon is it possible that there is a better way of doing-church and a way for Christians to grow together in peace, striving to maintain unity with each other as they learn and grow together in greater knowledge of Christ and in godly behavior?

These are honest heartfelt questions many of today's new generation of teenage Christians are struggling with as they grow since many of them (including myself) have seen Christian families divided and good Christian friends broken up because of this kind of dogma.

As for me I live in the hope that they can discover a better way of proclaiming the Good News of the Gospel and a better way of doing-church that will not be so dogmatic and not cause so many divisions amongst the local Christian community and the global body of Christ.

Because of global communication today most, of the new generation of Christians rising up understand that the body of Christ is global and therefore much bigger than any one religious organization, institution or church. Added to this truth in our day of global communication they have in the palm of their hand an abundance of Bible information readily available to them whenever they want to access it and this information is not bound by any religious organization, denomination, church walls, rules, creeds or dogma.

Perhaps the root cause of divisions is not the fundamental truths, but stems from faith being taught from religious institutions, organization, churches and the pulpit as an exact theology, meaning if you have all the doctrines ticked off correctly you are saved, but if not bad luck.

When this approach is looked into with a little insight it become obvious that it is doomed for division simply because faith is not as sharply defined as we might like it to be, added to this dilemma is the fact that salvation is in a relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ and relationships are not black and white, there are a multitude of varying shades of grey in-between.

To compound this dilemma even further no one has to be a walking Bible encyclopedia to know Christ, nor do they have to have every teaching of the Bible correct before they are saved and not every Scripture is relevant to salvation. Adding even more to these dilemmas is the truth that we are all saved by grace and not one of us can know how much intellectual error grace covers.

Another reason the body of Christ lacks unity may well be because many churches have added extra doctrinal teachings to the simplicity of the message of the cross that leads to salvation. When doctrines are taught that are not important to a person's salvation even though they maybe right and I might fully agree with them they take on far more importance than they should when they are legalistically and dogmatically taught as being important to know before a repentant sinner seeking God can be saved to eternal life.

When this happens instead of what is being taught being edifying and strengthening the faith of others it not only becomes a hindrance to salvation, but also causes division. Often the problem is not that the doctrine is wrong, but that it is give more importance than it should have.

It should always be remembered that God's grace not only covers sins of the flesh, but also intellectual errors and that God sees the motive of the heart and can adjust accordingly because He is a living God with a loving and caring heart, not a dogmatic legalistic school teacher.

Jesus always referred to God as "My Father" the heart of a Father is always full of love, mercy and grace toward his children, we are the children of God and He is, "Our heavenly Father" and as such will judge us according to the motives and intents of our heart and not according to our head knowledge or lack of it. God is not bound by legalistic dogma.

To make matters even worse under our system of doing-church each group is forced to protect their particular statement of faith and set of doctrines and to do this they often treat other faithful Christians who genuinely have devotion for Christ, but hold a different statement of faith or set of doctrines almost as enemies. I have no-doubt when we do this we are separating ourselves from some who Christ with open arms accepts into his Kingdom and who are part of his global eternal family.

Since almost every church claims to have the truth it seems strange (to me at least) that many appear to be afraid to fellowship with others and sit together in a Spirit of grace and peace to discuss the things that we understand differently. Surely if we believe we have the truth there should be no fear in being challenged since if what we believe is true it should stand on its own and if we are proved to be in error surely that is a good thing so what is there to be afraid of?

Perhaps this type of thinking is idealistic of me for the following four reasons: -

1. Some are so emotionally involved with what they believe that it would be unbearable for them to even entertain the thought of being wrong.
2. Some are so heavily indoctrinated that it would be almost impossible for them to consider something different let alone believe something different.
3. Some are so spiritually prideful their hearts would be far too hardened to listen to another point of view no matter how faithful a brother or sister in Christ might be.
4. Some are motivated by pride and the craving for power, importance, control and money and are therefore not interested in what is true, but only those teachings that appeal to the majority.

Many Christians today, when they look around and see that even in their own religious organizations, denominations and churches there are multitudes of divisions are confused and disillusioned (especially the younger generation and new converts) as it is a very poor reflection of the character of God and the character Lord Jesus Christ.

Since there are so many divisions amongst faithful brothers and sisters in Christ I am tempted to wonder if the entire religious system itself creates the problem. Let me explain, the majority of pastors and ministers depend on a certain amount of people to financially support their families. Therefore it is not in their interest to have their congregations mixing with others.

It gets even worse than that, because as our system is it actually encourages or at least tempts the ministers to demean other churches to protect their own support group, but even this is not the root cause of the problem because I have been in Christian organizations in which no one is paid and yet they still have just as many divisions amongst their own organization as those churches whose congregations do pay their pastor or minister.

Perhaps the problem for some Christians is simply fear and insecurity in what they believe and are afraid that if one part of what they believe is proven wrong their entire salvation will crumble as it did with me. This would be one of the great advantages of mixing together since it would prevent this type of thinking because no-one would be putting their total trust in any one teacher, everyone would be motivated to examine the Scriptures themselves to see if what each of us is saying is correct and in its right context.

During these times of discussion people would realize as they observed others that not everyone in the body of Christ has the same understanding of all Scripture and yet they are still a faithful brother or sister in the family of Christ. It would become very evident that we don't have to have every doctrine perfectly ticked to be saved to eternal life and in union with the Lord Jesus Christ and his heavenly Father. This observation would result in the mental and emotional freedom for faithful brothers and sisters in Christ to talk to other believers about Christ without feeling they must defend their particular view or attack what the other may say should it be different.

Providing we were all walking humbly before God, this I think would be the beauty of mixing and fellowshiping with each other, brothers and sisters would be able to reason and discuss the Scriptures together and prove each other right or wrong in a spirit of love and unity until we all came to the same truth. The greatest danger in this format would be human pride, nevertheless pride is still a big problem in the format we have today (try telling one of the men standing behind the pulpit you think they are wrong) (of course there are exceptions).

Learning together maybe a better way of doing-church in today's world of global communication as opposed to listening to one man, who is never challenged and trusting that what he is teaching is right. Consider for a moment the early church Jews who had been indoctrinated in the laws of Moses, the Levitical priesthood and Jewish religious customs and traditions were coming together with Gentile men and woman who knew nothing of Israel's God and had most likely worshipped idols and pagan gods all their life.

They were meeting together in home churches of faithful brothers and sisters in Christ and learning and growing together in the Lord. When they did have a problem they called on an elder they all respected who lived in their community and fellowshiped in one of the surrounding home churches to come and visit them to discuss the matter. The Spirit that united them together was not dogmatic creeds, but the love of Christ, love is the cement that holds us to Christ and should hold us together in the Lord.

John wrote: -

- Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love (1 John 4:8).
- So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him (1 John 4:16).

It is also possible that the system we have today would be fine if the leaders of the church taught their congregations that we are all on a spiritual journey growing in godly behavior and in intellectual Scriptural knowledge and that not all Scripture is important to know to be saved to eternal life and that we are not saved by having a set list of doctrines perfectly ticked, but by being in a right relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Following are two different perspectives of salvation: -

1. Some see salvation like a solid brick wall they believe that providing all the bricks (symbolizing doctrines) are in place the wall is secure, but take a brick or two out and the wall collapses. This is how many view their salvation in Christ.
2. Others see salvation like a trampoline, in this symbolism the flexible canvas is Christ and the springs holding the canvas firm are the doctrines. In this view two or three springs can be taken out and examined for weakness and flaws without any fear of the canvas collapsing. Should the springs prove to be faulty they are of course thrown away and replaced with new ones, but during all this time the canvas has not been affected it continues to remain flexible and strong.

Maybe if congregations were all taught to see salvation as a trampoline rather than a brick wall then the faithful in the global body of Christ would be free of fear, legalism and dogma and be able to fellowship with others who had a passion for Christ, but may have a different understanding of various clumps of Scripture perhaps in this way we would all be able to sit together in a relaxed atmosphere lift out a couple of springs and examine them in an attitude of spiritual adventure and excitement instead of an attitude of defense and attack.

Many say they would just love to love everyone who loves Christ and let Jesus do the judging, could it be as easy as that?

Paul wrote: -

- If anyone builds on the foundation (which is Jesus Christ) with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, they will receive a reward, but if anyone's work is burned up, they will suffer loss, though they themselves will be saved, but only as through fire (1 Cor. 3:11-15).

If Christ is going to judge each one of us and even though some have built their lives on wood, hay and straw he is still going to accept them into his eternal Kingdom surely we should offer the same grace and stop judging the salvation of others who have a passion for Christ and faithfully follow him.

It should be mention here that accepting a person does not mean agreeing with them on every issue of life or of doctrine, many people have devoted friends, but they don't always agree with each other on every issue of life, even married couples who have lived together for years in a loving relationship, don't see eye to eye on every aspect of life.

Children (especially teenagers) don't always see eye to eye with their parents, but the family remains together because of love. Perhaps if the local and global body of Christ modeled the church on the design God has given for a natural family and allowed love and grace to be king rather than dogma and legalism there would not only be far less division, but the local church would be a far better testimony to its community and the global body of Christ would be a far better testimony to the world.

Unfortunately I fear that fallen human nature (self, ego and pride) will prevent this from happening until the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, hopefully I am proven wrong and the new generation of Christians rising up will find a better way of fellowshiping and doing-church with other faithful brothers and sister in Christ who are repentant over their shortcomings, have been water baptized and their lives outwardly evidence their inward faith for Christ and their love for his return despite the fact they may have certain theological and doctrinal differences Certainly if we could accept each other in a spirit of grace rather than divide and realize we are all part of the global body of Christ it would be a much better testimony to those outside the church.

Jesus said: -

- My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me (John 10:27).

Since Jesus knows those who are his we don't have to concern ourselves with who is saved and who is not our role is to walk before the Lord with our own conscience endeavoring to grow in the fruits of the Spirit and allowing other faithful brothers and sisters in Christ to do the same. Much is what I believed when I was water baptized into the body of Christ forty-five years ago I don't believe today, nevertheless even though I have far more knowledge today I was just as much saved on that day I entered the waters of baptism as I am today.

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