

## THE SCANDAL OF THE CHURCH

In worship, organization, work, and other features, the faithful churches of Christ in the first century and in the twenty-first century are identical. This is that for which those who love Christ supremely live: to reproduce in our time the church as Jesus planned it and built it through His apostles.

Despite our concern for the pattern, there is one area where many otherwise dedicated brethren have chosen to follow human philosophy instead of inspired command and example. 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 it 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, church directories are generally bloated with a sizeable percentage 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. Their friends who know they claim to be “members of the church of Christ” mock the church because of their reprobate lives. More and more elderships are allowing unruly and immoral members and false teachers to do what they will without rebuke.

Why is this so? Not because the commands or examples of Scripture are unclear. Emphatic demonstrations of both abound (e.g., Mat. 18:15–17; Rom. 16:17–18; 1 Cor. 5:1–5; 2 Cor. 2:5–9; 2 The. 3:6–15; 2 John 9–11). Why then will 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 so-and-so.” Still others say, “We have no right to judge,” “It will do no good,” and like things. All such excuses demonstrate far more influence from human reason and fear than faith in God’s Word.

For failure to obey the New Testament in this matter, not a few congregations have surrendered their very identity. They are little different from the world because so much of the world has crept into them. What started as a “little leaven” has “leavened the whole lump” (1 Cor. 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 and He calls upon us to keep her pure. When, oh when, will brethren clean up this scandal?

—Dub McClish

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