

# A Sad Story That Hits “Close to Home”

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I spent 8 years of my youth (1946–1953) in the small central town of Burnet, Texas. My father preached for the faithful congregation there the first 4 of those years and the following 4 years for a strong rural congregation in Burnet County. The “town” congregation had a series of faithful preachers following Dad for many years. I preached in a Gospel meeting there in 1987. Subsequent years brought incremental but consequential drifts from the “old paths.” In 2002, a godly correspondent sent me the following clipping from a January edition of *The Burnet Bulletin*, the “paper of record” for the small county seat town. I am reproducing it below and will make a few comments on it because it demonstrates the disastrous end of gradual compromise that an increasing number of brethren seem determined to take. *The Burnet Bulletin* announcement is as follows (bracketed material supplied by our correspondent):

## Burnet Ministerial Alliance

The Burnet Ministerial Alliance will present “Equipping the Saints in Burnet,” a school for laity. The sessions will be held from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., Monday and Tuesday, Feb. 4–5, at Our Lady of Sorrows Religious Education Center in Burnet. Each person may attend one course, which will meet for the two nights of the program.

The courses offered are: “The Book of Romans,” by Rev. Richard Bremer [Lutheran], “The Book of Titus,” by Rev. Tim Denton [Church of Christ], “Spirituality,” by Rev. Joe DeVlieghe [Catholic], “Music in the Church,” by Rev. Susan Lijstrand [Presbyterian], “The Church as Family,” by Rev. Russell Minton [Methodist], and “Abraham, Father of Three Faiths,” by Rev. George Perrine [Disciples of Christ].

The behavior of many still “identifying” themselves as part of the church of Christ is blurring the line in various ways between the church and unauthorized religious organizations. The behavior of “Rev. Tim Denton” described above does far more than merely blur the line—it totally erases it. I well know that the secular media have for generations commonly affixed *Rev.* to the names of Gospel preachers in their ignorance of Scriptural teaching concerning religious titles. However, given the context in which the name and behavior of “Rev. Tim Denton” appear in the foregoing article, who can believe that he has any objection to being so addressed and described? In fact, he would be inconsistent to quibble over such, given his involvement in the described organization and its activities.

Preachers who join a “Ministerial Alliance” have already surrendered the Truth in their hearts or they would not join such. *Alliance* implies union and mutual support and endorsement of the aims

of the members. Membership in any such “alliance” is therefore a tacit statement of fellowship and agreement with the “allies,” whether so intended or not. Elders who support a preacher of this stripe share equal guilt with the preacher. Can anyone seriously picture our Lord or one of the apostles joining any such organization that might have existed in their day?

One who excuses his membership in such by claiming to seek an opportunity to teach the sectarian preachers is either extremely naïve or self-deceived. By his membership he has totally yielded the Scriptural ground on the distinctiveness and oneness of the church. He has admitted – with the force of a demonstration – that he sees no difference between denominationalism and the Lord’s church. His membership is in effect a proclamation that he considers the church to be only one more denomination among the others. Preachers do not join ministerial alliances to **teach** the “allies,” but to engage in the back slapping and glad handing of each other while ignoring each others’ errors – as if religious Truth and error are nonexistent and/or inconsequential.

Read again the news story above. Note that one of “our” preachers taught in this “laity school.” Again, this might have been the description chosen by the reporter, but it sounds more like the description chosen by the alliance. Apparently, “Rev. Denton” did not mind his name’s being attached to this unscriptural and anti-scriptural terminology. I must also suppose that he did not object to being part of an alliance (and a “school”) that included acceptance of a woman preacher (Can we doubt what she taught on her topic, “Music in the Church”?).

Note the theme of the “school”: “Equipping the Saints in Burnet.” Since “Rev. Denton” taught a class in this school, two things are evident:

1. He must believe that denominational preachers, despite all of their sectarian errors, will be imparting Biblical instruction.
2. He believes the members of the various denominations are “saints.”

The lineup of teachers and their topics is most interesting. It is nauseating to think that one who claims to be a Gospel preacher would get within ten miles of such a “school.” Since “Rev. Denton” did his class on Titus, I wonder how much attention he gave and what applications he made (if any) to Paul’s instructions relating to Scriptural church polity (1:5–9)...

**For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that were wanting, and appoint elders in every city, as I gave thee charge; if any man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having children that believe, who are not accused of riot or unruly. For the bishop must be blameless, as God's steward; not self-willed, not soon angry, no brawler, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but given to hospitality, a lover of good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled; holding to the faithful word which is according to the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in the sound doctrine, and to convict the gainsayers.**

Or about false teachers (1:10–14),

**For there are many unruly men, vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped; men who overthrow whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake. One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, idle gluttons. This testimony is true. For which cause reprove them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men who turn away from the truth.**

Or about “the washing of regeneration” by which we are saved (3:4–5),

**But when the kindness of God our Saviour, and his love toward man, appeared, not by works *done* in righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to his mercy he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,**

Or about heretics (3:10).

**A factious man after a first and second admonition refuse;**

He could hardly have aimed any of the apostle’s strong terminology at his denominational allies.

If he even touched on these strong statements, it isn’t hard to imagine his referring to those narrow-minded, moss-backed, judgmental Pharisee types in the “old” church of Christ as those “whose mouths must be stopped.” Personally, I would take no offense at being referred to as a member of the “old” church of Christ. I certainly do not want anyone to identify me with the “new” Church of Christ, of which “Rev. Denton” is obviously a part. It is lamentable beyond expression that the name and the church of the Lord are being so corrupted and shamed, not by those without, but by those within, in many communities across our land. Elderships and congregations that support such compromisers deserve just what they get, but tragically, many souls will be lost in the process and it is saddening beyond description to faithful saints that the foregoing situation is but representative of many congregations with long histories of faithfulness, which, like Israel of old, have sacrificed loyalty to God and His Word in their lust to become “like all the [denomi]nations” (1 Sam. 8:9).

**[Note:** I wrote this article, and it originally appeared in the April 2002 issue of *The Gospel Journal*, a 36-page monthly of which I was editor at the time.]

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