



But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. -

Matthew 15:9

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Why Attend Where Falsehoods are Taught?

Last week, in introducing myself, I left a rather incomplete discussion.

I talked about the need to relate to other people who share our quest for God. But I also warned about the tendency of congregations, especially those linked to a denomination, to demand that you submit to their particular list of beliefs. I asked, "What's a believer to do?"

My advice may at first sound dishonest, but I'm going to back myself up with a reference to the writings of Paul, so stay tuned.

I continue to attend the congregation I was in as I began to learn more and more of the truth about God and his pure goodness. That congregation has pushed me out of certain roles because of my beliefs, but it allows me to attend and to play the organ for services. And since that's where my family, who moved here about two years ago, attend, my continued appearance there supports family togetherness.

My defense against the frequent nonsense preached from the pulpit each week is to sleep through the sermon. Actually, I'd been doing that some already anyway, based on my age. But if I don't hear the nonsense I'm less likely to get worked up about it. That's good for my health.

And I look at it this way. I used to believe many of the things they believe. Not all of them, but many of them. Indeed there are some fundamental beliefs that I share with them. I believe God was with me in that time, even if I didn't believe all the truth about him. I would even go so far as to say that no human ever comes to a full knowledge of the truth about God. We are all growing in our

understanding and we all will continue to grow for all eternity.

So God is able to relate to them and their misunderstandings of him just as he did with me when I was growing to where I am now. And since we are on a journey, it's quite likely that in ten years I will look back on what I believe now and see how limited and even wrong I was.

But some might wonder if it isn't dishonest to meet with people who disagree with you and to keep quiet about those disagreements. Shouldn't we always proclaim truth? Truth is not an idea or a list of facts; Truth is a person. And that person spent a short lifetime breaking truth to people a little at a time.

"I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear," Jesus told his disciples on his last night with them. He went on to promise that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, would guide them into all truth. So even Jesus held back on truth that people weren't ready to hear. I think that's what is meant by the phrase, "speaking the truth in love."

And now my Pauline reference:

"Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters." (Romans 14:1) In this chapter Paul addresses some of the behavioral expectations people of weak faith try to impose on other believers. Paul asserted his freedom from such restrictions, but he also warned that if his freedom would violate another man's conscience then he wouldn't exercise it

"So whatever you believe about these things, keep between yourself and God." (Verse 22) This is living the principle of Godly love. Even though I have a right to live in freedom, I will not use my freedom to destroy another. I will unselfishly give up my right for the sake of a weak brother who could be destroyed by seeing me do what his conscience condemns.

So, to sum up. You have to choose to meet with a group of believers you can stand. Don't put yourself in for more punishment than you can bear. But don't expect that you will ever find a group of believers who fully agree with you. Learn to keep your beliefs to yourself when you know voicing them will start conflict. Love those around you enough to respect their progress along the path of enlightenment.

Happy Sabbath to all,

Elkanah