

*Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ*

**Ephesians 4:15**

## Store In My Heart

### Jeremiah 29:13

You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.

This powerful statement to the Jews in their time of difficulty is also very necessary for us to consider today. It is such a simple statement of fact that we might overlook the fullness of what is said. If our search for God is not filled with devotion to find Him, we will be unsuccessful.

To find God we must desire to be with Him more than anything else. Our search must be in earnest and it must be an action that consumes the whole of our being. To search for God with only part of our attention would indicate that we are not really willing to give Him our all. God does not want those who are not fully committed. He wants only those who are ready to give Him their all to find Him. God wants complete devotion.



# Believing the Best About Other Christians

## Matthew W. Bassford

I've stayed out of the online debate about how churches should respond to the coronavirus, and whether churches that assemble are more righteous than churches that don't (or vice versa). As far as I am concerned, this is a marvelous opportunity to honor the great Scriptural principle of congregational autonomy. If we all mind our own business, Facebook will be a quieter, happier place.

However, I did see an argument advanced that I thought was worthy of further consideration. Somebody online, I don't remember who, opined that continued suspension of services was a problem because many Christians would get out of the habit of assembling and never come back. I don't think that's true. From what I see, the vast majority of Christians assemble because they want to, not out of habit. Those who stop assembling because of coronavirus isolation probably would have stopped assembling soon anyway.

The argument does reveal, though, a lamentable tendency among brethren—a mistrust of other Christians' moral capacity and goodwill. We can't trust them to figure out the right thing to do, or to do it if they did figure it out, so we have to figure it out for them and manipulate or coerce them into doing it.

I think this is what is behind, for instance, the "conservative" conception of modesty. In **1 Timothy 2**, Paul instructs Christian women to be modest, supplies a few examples that have to do with costly rather than revealing clothing (not normally a preoccupation of brethren today), and then leaves it to the sisters to determine what modest dress means for themselves.

However, some today are not content to leave modesty where Paul left it. From the Scriptural principle, they draw their own conclusions about appropriate hemline height and neckline depth, using some truly obscure passages (**Exodus 28:42**, anyone?) to bolster their arguments. To them, these conclusions have the same force as, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," and woe betide the woman who shows up at church with a 23-inch skirt instead of a 24-inch skirt!

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## For Our Information

Joyce Venable is aching from arthritis.

Phyllis Jackson has cataract surgery and John Jackson has dental surgery scheduled soon.

Paula Laubach is doing better.

Vickie McNees is still recovering from a recent fall.

Betty Ragsdale is still having pain in her neck.

Dan & JoBeth will be in Texas for most of this week visiting with their children.

Pray for safety, courage & healing.

I believe that those who make such arguments sincerely believe that they have to, that without such explicit, concrete application, the women of the church are foolish and ungodly enough that they won't reach the right result on their own. Here too, I disagree, not merely with the result, but also with the mode of thinking behind it.

Fundamentally, the churches of Christ exist because of the conviction that individual Christians are competent to understand and apply the Scriptures for themselves. If we don't think that's true, if we believe instead that most brethren are not willing and able to figure out what pleases God on their own, we might as well give it up and join the denomination of our choice!

What's more, when church leaders insist on doing all the thinking for their people, even if the sign out front says "church of Christ", within, a denominational spirit predominates. The Bible is no longer the authority. The church leader is.

Second, those who are so skeptical about others would do well to turn their skepticism on themselves. All of us have our moments of foolishness and ill will. All of us grapple with the temptation to determine our conclusion first and twist the Scriptures to fit. When we disagree with someone else's conclusion, then, rather than seeking to impose ours on them, we first must humbly re-examine our own thinking. Even after we have done so, we must accord their views the respect we desire for our own.

I recognize that to some, this vision of Christianity will seem unbearably chaotic. You will end up going to church with people with whom you disagree. On the basis of their different conclusions, they will say and do things that make you uncomfortable. Where is the **1Corinthians 1:10** unity in that???

We must remember, though, that Jesus prayed for His people to become one rather than expecting them to start that way. Greater unity in local congregations must come from below, as we grow in understanding and love for one another, rather than being imposed from the top.

Top-down unity, though appealing, is brittle. It relies on church leaders silencing or driving out those who disagree, which doesn't sound much like **John 17** or **1Corinthians 1** either. Instead, we are called to believe the best about one another, speak truth in love, and be patient. That way, over time, those who are in error will be called to grow beyond their mistaken conclusions.

Maybe we will be the ones who will do the growing.

(This article does well in dealing with one of the most difficult parts of teaching, ensuring that I am not teaching my opinion or conclusions as facts that must be accepted. I thought this article would be a good compliment to some of the things we touched on in our Wednesday evening class in **1Corinthians 7**. Paul made a clear distinction between his opinion and the Lord's command regarding the marriage relationship. Keep Learning. DLH)



We seek only to serve God according to His Will!