



Articles and Sermons :: Should I Stay in My Church?

Should I Stay in My Church? - posted by TMK (), on: 2019/8/24 8:34

By Steve Gregg:

The following is my recent response to a sister who has had trouble finding a good church (sound familiar?), and was wondering if she should keep looking or simply remain in a loving small church where she currently attends, despite some significant problems that she sees there. My response may be of value to others in similar circumstances.

Hi Bà€

You repeatedly emphasize that the church you are attending as very loving. This is the best thing one may hope to find in a church. Of course, being extremely "friendly," or "welcoming," is not the same thing as agape loveâ€though both may be present. Some small churches are very excited to see fresh blood showing up at the door, and fall all over themselves to be welcoming, in their eagerness to secure another potential member of an otherwise diminishing congregation. Of course, I am not suggesting anything, along these lines, about your particular church.

However, if the love of Christ is really being lived-out by this group, then, in my opinion, love can cover a multitude of sins. Love mayâ€but that doesn't mean that your comfort level will be accommodated.

A church with women as elders definitely has a different approach to scripture than my ownâ€though a church that would never tolerate women in the pulpit may also disagree with me on even more serious issues. You have tried many churches, and found this one to be the best so far. Perhaps tolerating their lack of biblical proficiency, and their difference of opinion about the church roles of women, is something you should count as the cost of your love for, and involvement with, them.

Even though I agree with your opinions in these matters, it would be a shame if you (while having greater biblical insights) were to be perceived as the most critical and judgmental person in the congregation. It is hard, sometimes, to speak the truth in loveâ€but it should always be possible, at least, to love.

I would wish for you to find a church that sees things your way (and my way) to a greater degree, but, as you have found, this may not be possible. I would emphasize that, when attending any church, you are not joining and dealing with an organization, but with people. The organization may stinkâ€and may present continual challenges to your patienceâ€but you are there for the people, not for the entity.

If you can love the peopleâ€just as you would love family members with whom you disagreeâ€you can pretend that the place where you encounter them is not a church building or an institutional meeting. Picture yourself in community with them as so many individuals, learning to minister to their needs as persons, rather than as co-participants in a religious organization. Let the so-called "church" be incidental to your relationships.

This last paragraph is a tragic necessity, due to the present compromised condition of the church. It would be more ideal to see the church as one entityâ€a bodyâ€and that each individual, including ourselves, is simply a limb or organ contributing to that larger organism. However, such a vision requires that the church exist and be recognized as a global society of the King, rather than (as it is in modern churches) as one of many organizationally-unrelated, local, tax-exempt corporations, each competing with the others for the limited tithe dollars from a finite local pool of potential members, so as to keep the staff members employed.

Of course, once you build relationships with people in any group, and love them unconditionally, without rejecting them on the basis of fairly-important differences, the danger (which can and must be avoided) is to begin to say that the truths they are failing to acknowledge are not important ones. The most natural thing in the world is to begin to approve of wrong behaviors and beliefs that are held by people you love. This is why so many Christians have softened on the topic of same-sex marriage. It is often because some family member or beloved friend is gay, and our sympathies are naturally with those whom we love. The challenge for us is to continue to disagree, while recognizing that our love for these people is unrelated to our level of agreement with them.

Of course, actual moral infractions committed by church members without repentance are not to be glossed over. Our love for the brethren requires us to confront their behaviors that are harming themselves and others physically, socially or spiritually. We are offended, of course, on God's behalf about such moral infractions, but, I suspect we will come off self-righteous in our confrontations if we simply present ourselves as God's policemen. We should remember that God, who wants people not to sin, nonetheless, sees billions of people sinning every day. This does not throw Him into a crisis. He apparently has thick skin. While He is saddened to have people fail to give Him the honor due Him, I think His greatest objection to sin is the harm it does to His children—both to the sinners and to those who suffer from the sins of others (I know that my children's sins bother me more for the damage they sustain in their own lives, than for the dishonor shown to me in them).

In other words, when we feel we should confront another's sins or errors, we should remember that God can take care of Himself, and that He wants us to act on behalf of His children's interests. He is not vulnerable to damage; they are. I picture this attitude resulting in an obvious display of compassion toward the sinner, while seeking to correct, rather than an indignation we feel as those acting merely on God's behalf. We do act on God's behalf, and for His glory, but He is most glorified when we are humble and compassionate in our addressing the flaws of others with them.

The bottom line is that I suspect you may have better reasons to stay in that church than you have for leaving it. I say this by way of concession, not as a commandment. God may lead you elsewhere. However, realize that if you should leave, sending a letter outlining your disagreements, those who remain in the church (including the pastors and elders) will not be likely to change their opinions or policies on the points of disagreement. They will, most likely, continue as they were doing before you were there—thinking you were not quite as gracious a person as they first had first thought—until they forget about you completely. I am suggesting that your presence there, as a gracious person with an alternative outlook, may end up helping the church more than would your leaving.

On the other hand, you also need to be fed and upheld in the truth by like-minded people. Clearly, certain resources on the internet can be sources of such encouragement, but they may not be enough. You may need, eventually, to find a better fellowship. You have to carefully discern, on an ongoing basis, whether you are having an impact on the people in your church for good, or whether your own spiritual life is deteriorating by your continued involvement.

In Jesus,
Steve

Re: Should I Stay in My Church? - posted by savannah, on: 2019/8/24 13:45

I attend the First Upside Down Church. It's located on Femi Nest Island at 316 Maytree Arky Lane. Should I stay or should I go now...?

One hath said, "Let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one."

But what do you say?