

“Ah, Blissful Ignorance”

“In our fellowship, traditions are starting to change...,” the sermon began. For the first few moments, he was curious. Then John sat way back in the pew. Curiosity had turned to astonishment. To say that what he was hearing was new to his family was like saying the Titanic hit an ice cube—gross understatement! Rob, the preacher, continued,

“For generations we have said that using mechanical instruments of music in worship is sinful. Tragically, such a conclusion has led to heart-rending division. But after engaging in intensive dialogue with Christian brethren from outside our fellowship, I’ve come to the conclusion that they are as sincere in their devotion to God as we are. Surely the God that we serve would not condemn someone over something as insignificant as a piano in worship or the number of times one takes the Lord’s Supper each week. God hates division. It is time to join hands. Our opinions are different. Our disagreements are petty. Our division sinful. It is time to heal the wounds. These matters of doctrine are not salvation issues. Love for one another is. Acceptance is. Tolerance is....”

After the sermon ended, the preacher met Stanley, one of the elders, at the door. With a smile and a wink Stanley said, “Well, that was step one. It seems to be going over well. At least no protests from radical right-wingers.” “Let’s hold our collective breath,” Rob replied. “If we get through this first week without a firestorm, I’ll introduce the rest of our unity-in-diversity plan in future lessons.” Stanley walked away with a, “Good deal, Rob—we’re behind ya.”

John and his family walked quietly to the car. The kids knew nothing about doctrine—they just knew it was play time—church was over. “What’s wrong, honey?” Jennifer knew her husband well enough to realize that something was gnawing at him. She had a good idea but wanted to hear it from John first.

Back home, and years before....

John had been raised “in the church.” His parents were members of the church. He had regularly attended Bible classes and worship assemblies all of his life. John even met his bride-to-be in the congregation and they had practically grown up together.

The congregation John had known back home was not large—only about 80 members in a town of 5000. Faces had changed through years but the message from the pulpit had not. Different preachers but all said pretty much the same things. “The church of Christ is distinctive.” That’s what the preachers had said. They said the church was not a denomination, and that it could not fellowship denominations. He had heard the pulpit denounce instrumental music in worship. The Bible class teachers stated repeatedly taught that Christ’s church follows the New Testament pattern. John never listened closely. Nor did John ever bother to learn exactly why. His parents didn’t explain. They just took him to church. And after all, isn’t that all that a family is required to do? John wished now that he could remember some of those old sermons he heard in years gone by.

John searched deep within to find an explanation for his current discomfort.

“I’m just not sure I understood where Rob was headed with that sermon. We sure never heard anything like that growing up.”

“But John, he has a Bible degree from ACU....,” Jennifer continued, “and it sure doesn’t seem that one would be saved or lost depending on how many times he took the Lord’s Supper each week. Too, instrumental music seems like such a petty thing to divide over.””

John thought the preacher could be wrong but he certainly didn’t want his Bible ignorance to be apparent to the brethren. After all, John and his young family of four were new to the congregation. They were new to the city. Making waves was the last thing on John’s mind. Maybe it’s not a salvation issue. Maybe the preachers back home were too conservative. John’s mind wandered to the

football game. After all, there was no need to fret

Just relax—I’ll tell
you what the Bible
says...trust me.

over church matters. We have elders here. And Jennifer was right—Rob does have a degree in Bible.

“Oh, well, what’s for lunch?”

How Did We Get Here?



Plenty of folks like John today. Plenty in the church. Lots of folks in denominations are the same way—they just don’t know what’s right, and worse, they don’t care enough to investigate. John Doe may very well typify so many that fill pews in churches of Christ.

Maybe you are John. You’re like him in that you’ve heard the truth from the pulpit, but never really learned it for yourself. You’ve

never really examined it for yourself. After all, why should you? The preacher wouldn't steer you wrong, would he? Elders in a congregation are there to keep it in line, aren't they? To investigate what you're taught—that's just not your job, is it?

Put It To The Test

God has placed an obligation squarely on your shoulders. It's an obligation you cannot escape without endangering yourself and those you love. It is an obligation to examine what you believe in light of what the Bible teaches. The inspired apostle sets it forth in clear, unmistakable language. "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). The New King James Version reads, "Test all things; hold fast what is good."

The word from which "prove" is translated means "to try" and further, "to test, examine, prove, scrutinize...to recognize as genuine after examination, to approve, deem worthy" (from Thayer's Greek Lexicon).

You have a responsibility then to investigate what you hear. The personality in the pulpit does not make the message true. The messenger can be both deceived and deceiving. Regardless of his motives, his personality, his charm, his wit, or (especially) his popularity, you must test what he says. The standard is the Bible. You can measure what you're taught with God's word. You must measure it. The apostle of love wrote, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (NKJV).

Plain ol' laziness will lead to heartache and tragedy. Your soul is at stake

here. You'll have to approach this as you would the most serious of life's challenges. It truly is.

You need to be absolutely fearless as you compare the Bible with the teaching you receive at the hands (and mouths) of others. Don't be intimidated. Ask questions. Demand Bible proof. And then launch into your own study of the scriptures.

Some interesting comments by Jesus reinforce the need to be discerning listeners.

Then came the disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, when they heard this saying? 13 But he answered and said, Every plant which my heavenly Father planted not, shall be rooted up. 14 Let them alone: they are blind guides. And if the blind guide the blind, both shall fall into a pit (Matthew 15:12-14).

Blind guides leading blind followers. Hmm... The picture is graphic. Red neon warning lights flash in your conscience. Do not blindly follow. Do not accept the doctrines you hear at face value. Your God loves you. He wants to take you home with Him for eternity. But he demands that you be a discerner. No more blank checks made payable to any polished speaker or writer.

A Lawyer You Would Not Want To Hire!

A lawyer in San Antonio. Nothing unusual about that—there's a lawyer most everywhere. I have many friends who are attorneys. I've worked with and for attorneys. This man makes his living with arguments and evidence. His vocation requires weighing positions and proof. But this lawyer was also a

member of the church. He counted an immensely popular, contemporary religious author as his dear friend and golfing companion. We had an opportunity to meet at a small congregation where I was speaking one Sunday. I mentioned that Max Lucado had erred from the truth on the matter of baptism's necessity and other doctrinal matters. The brother-lawyer took great exception. His response went something like this: "I want you to know that Max Lucado is a good friend of mine—we play golf together. He wouldn't teach anything wrong. And he does not teach what you say he teaches." But I could document what I said, and was certainly not misrepresenting this well-known preacher/author. Nothing personal against Lucado, but HE HAD TAUGHT IT, HE HAD TAUGHT IT PUBLICLY, AND HE HAD REPEATEDLY TAUGHT IT. The author was not ashamed of his position. I could (and can) document it. So I offered, "Would you care to consider the evidence?" "No! I won't read anything you've got." His mind was made up! Don't confuse him with the facts! But do you see, dear reader, how blind and inconsistent certain hearts can be? When it came to truth or friendship, a personality won the contest. Truth became irrelevant. You wouldn't hire a lawyer who refused to consider evidence. God will not save the person who refuses to "prove all things."

Did you realize that every eternally lost person will have at least one thing in common? It will be simply this: he had no real love for truth. The Bible tells us so.

And with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. 11 And for

this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, 12 that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness (NKJV).

Truth is the ally of every person who wants to be in heaven. It sets us at liberty from the sin and his ugly step-brother, ignorance. "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). But love any person or doctrine more than truth and truth leaves the house.

Want To Be Noble?

There were some fine folks who lived and died centuries ago. These people could have been from Missouri, the "show me" state. They were active listeners—not passive consumers. And the Bible records that they were commended.

And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who when they were come thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. 11 Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of the mind, examining the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so (Acts 17:10-11).

These Bereans were noble folks. Why? Because they loved one another? Because they played well together? No, because they examined. They compared. They heard, then they scrutinized. They wanted to know the right from the wrong. "These were more noble..."

John's Approach

Have you ever turned over in bed and heard your stomach growl.

“Hungry—again!” Will hunger produce a late night refrigerator raid? The debate rages for only a moment before fatigue wins the contest. *“But I’m also tired—too tired to get up.”* Back to sleep. John felt uncomfortable with the preacher’s message of doctrinal change, but his discomfort meant little to him. No real Bible knowledge. Content with the status quo. No effort. Little or no conviction. A spiritual couch potato. A “do-nothing.” The spectator who watches the victim drown. The passerby with a policy of non-involvement. His motto? “Don’t rock the boat—just coast through the waters of religion no matter whether clean or polluted. Don’t check. Don’t investigate. Don’t weigh it out. Don’t let it bother you...don’t give it another thought.”

But John Doe will give it thought. One day. One great, last moment. At a “twinkling of an eye” (1 Cor. 15:52). Willful ignorance will exact too precious a price—an eternity of regret. “Prove all things...”