

A Personal Urging to Action

I was raised by Christian parents. In elementary school, I liked to read books of Bible stories. In fifth grade, I got my first Bible. It was an *International Children's Bible* and I enjoyed it throughout fifth grade.

In junior high, I became more interested in natural science about space starting in seventh grade. In eighth grade, I came to think that there was a natural explanation for everything. I decided that religion was nothing more than a primal instinct of humans to comfort themselves about a 'pre-scientifically unexplainable' universe by putting 'superhumans' in control. I believed that there were no gods, that religious thought was a primal instinct from ignorance, and that it must be resisted. I was an atheist.¹ⁿ

My parents decided the whole family would go to church regularly. The places they took us to were buildings of a church group that was very factious then. I did not learn much about things of the Lord at these places for two reasons. First, as an atheist, I cared little about what was being talked about, and did not listen much. Second, when I was listening, most of what I heard was disparagements of other Christian groups²ⁿ – usually Baptists. I knew little of Christianity at the time, so when nearly everything I heard was the 'errors' and 'faults' of 'everyone else,' I learned little about what is involved with becoming and being a Christian.

I did know one thing. I had read enough of Christ's teachings to know that 'right place'/'wrong place' on Sunday morning had nothing to do with whether or not a person was a Christian. The ICB uses "followers" where the King James Version has "disciples." I knew that in Scripture, being a follower of Jesus Christ made a person a Christian. It was strange to me that preachers who urged their congregations to 'go with just the Bible' thought a follower of Jesus Christ was a non-Christian based on where s/he was on Sunday morning.

While in high school, I was still being compulsively taken to these buildings, but a friend was inviting me also to youth events hosted by the Baptist congregation his father was pastor of. While I did not have a great interest in the Bible lessons, the events had fun activities. By April of 1993, when I was 16 years old, I could no longer accept that everything 'just happens,' so I realized that there had to be at least one god.

¹ Atheism does not involve worship of any deity, but does have religious beliefs.

In my experience there seem to be two main types of self-designated 'atheists': a) those who claim to be such for convenience or emotional reasons, and b) real atheists. The former type often seek self-promotion and/or loathe theistic religion, religious morality, religious people, and/or God. Those of the real type truly think that there really are no gods. This was my category.

On a personal note, the type of militant 'atheists' who have become a societal problem as of c. 2000 was alien to my experience. I have known well one other real atheist. It was never upsetting to either of us when religious people practiced their religion in the presence of either of us. It never occurred to me to get upset. I simply viewed the worshippers as deluded. I assumed it to be a right of civilized society that people should be allowed free peaceful expression of whatever their religion. As I did not believe in any gods, worship of God was totally meaningless to me. I even sometimes went along with it to be polite, as I believed worship acts to be totally meaningless.

As of c. 2000, there is an upsurge of 'atheists' who adamantly oppose any non-disapproval of theistic religion or non-disapproval just of Christianity. It does not take approval to make them hostile: any level of respect toward theistic religion or just Christianity is unacceptable to them. Their religious intolerance is so deep that they seek to prevent others from free expression of their religion -- even if it does not genuinely affect them. I skeptically think: 'If you truly think God does not exist, why does it mean so much to you that no respect is shown to worship of Him? It never bothered me.'

² Since that time, this focus has ceased to exist at these specific places.

I originally planned to make a hybrid religion from a consensus of `major' moral world religions, but came to realize that I ought to be a Christian. On the morning of Thursday, June 17, 1993, in the pastor's office of that Baptist congregation, the youth pastor explained to me that getting a baptism ceremony for myself would not save me. It was shown to me from Scripture that we cannot and will not be saved by our own efforts to follow the Lord. It was shown to me why Christ died. All people are guilty of sins, which a just God cannot allow to go unpunished. Still, God wanted us mortals to be saved. Therefore, God made a plan. Jesus Christ came to this earth in a human body. Jesus Christ lived a sinless life, so He had no sins of His own to be punished for, and therefore could die to bear the penalty for our sins. It was shown to me that to be saved, a person needs to trust in Christ's death for salvation.¹ⁿ It was explained to me that to be saved, a person must have a genuine faith that leads the person to follow the Lord.²ⁿ I was told to decide whether or not I would come to the Lord Jesus Christ, and right then and there I decided to.

I began assembling with that Baptist congregation. It was my church home for five years and a few months.³ⁿ I thought it was strange that so many servants of Christ minimized their dealings, fellowship, and cooperation with each other on the basis of church congregation.⁴ⁿ

With this congregation, I was in Sunday School and would often go to evening service in addition to the morning service. In private study, which I tried to do daily, I was prone to go through New Testament books, and write what I understood them to be saying verse-by-verse. I also studied about the books of the Bible, picking up a lot of background information. I was learning a lot about Scripture very quickly. Before long, I was interested in subjects that Christians debate over, wanting to see if I could `solve' those disputes.

I began studying these disputed matters in efforts to `solve' those disputes. 1 Timothy 6:4 has an often-unnoticed reproof of people "obsessed with disputes" (NKJV). No one warned me that becoming unduly interested in arguments and disputes is not wise. To the contrary, it was encouraged; to become `grounded in the Word of God' regarding such disputes was considered `growing to maturity in the meat of the Word of God' or even `growth in the Lord.' I got caught up focusing on subjects that Jesus Christ is not documented saying anything about – despite the fact that as an unbeliever I had known the Lord's priorities just from perusing His sermons, deeds, and discourses.⁵ⁿ I should have known better.

When I saw 1 Timothy 6:4, I never again felt right about my enjoyment of arguments. I had my rationalizations, but I still never felt right about how much fun an argument was or my rationalizations. Over a period of several years, I lost my enjoyment of arguments, and also my interest in arguments that did not amount to Christian living or proper value of Christ and His work. Per Scripture, this should have been the case to begin with. 1 Timothy 6:3-4a translated closely says:

¹ To be sure, the prior congregations did believe these things, but detail was scanty because of their emphases on baptism and on disparagements of other Christian groups. I did not pick up those beliefs.

² Detail from Scripture on all these matters relevant to salvation is in *Part 4*.

³ At time of this writing, my church home is not a Baptist congregation.

⁴ This even happens when their congregation buildings are within eyesight of each other, or even right next to each other!

⁵ **If any new Christians are reading this, please do not let anyone convince you that it is not of maturity to keep your focus on the subjects Jesus Christ taught about.** As a Christian, you should keep your focus on the subjects Jesus Christ is documented teaching about.

"If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not adhere to sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to a godly life, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in disputes" (NASB|NBV|NASB|NLT 1996|NASB|NKJV).

Here at 1 Timothy 6:3-4a, Greek translated "does not adhere to" is the negation of προσερχομαι strictly "draw near."¹ The problem with the disapproved teachings is just that it does not stick to these subjects. Many people wrongly think that the problem with the disapproved teachings was that they were inaccurate. Here is the truth: the problem with the disapproved teachings is that they simply did not stick to the appointed subjects.

It has been my observation that most of the things Christian groups strive over and seek to stay divided over are exactly what 1 Timothy 6:3-4a reproveth. Many people think that their disputed distinctive teachings are what the Lord would want taught. However, these disputed distinctive teachings typically have nothing to do with anything Jesus Christ is documented saying "words" about. Also, these disputed distinctive teachings typically have no relevance to living in ways that please God in overall regular life.

If we want to be Christians, we have to follow Jesus Christ's teachings. Christians are to enact His teachings. 1 Timothy 6:3-4a tells us we need to "adhere to" the "sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ." To be right Christians, we need to be following the "sound words" spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ prayed at John 17:20-1a during His death experience "Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word, that they may all be one" (ASV). It is sad that so many toss aside this dying wish of Christ when others do not agree with their teachings about 'how to serve Christ.'

The truth is: we Christians do not need to 'surmise'/'infer' what the Lord wants in the case of John 17:20-1a. He wants all those who "believe on" Him to "all be one." Whatever we 'surmise' about 'what the Lord wants taught,' John 17:20-1a requires no surmising. In level of certainty, that exceeds any 'surmising' we come up with about 'what the Lord wants taught.'²ⁿ Therefore, we ought to be following John 17:20-1a.

It is not good that many people claiming to follow Christ actually prefer not to follow His words at John 17:20-1a. Many people insist that they be agreed with about 'what the Lord wants taught,'³ⁿ and that their teachings about 'what the Lord wants taught' be adopted by everyone who wants to be a Christian. If any Christian does not agree with their teachings about 'what the Lord wants taught,' they have unpleasant feelings toward that Christian, as well as for any others who hold religious tenets that discord with what they want in the Lord's church. They prefer to stay 'unwarmly' separate from any such Christians. As far as they are concerned, what Jesus Christ wished at John 17:20-1a 'can' be honored when everyone else agrees 'enough' with them – but not a moment before. In their desire to be agreed with, they are setting aside Jesus Christ's dying will; whether intentionally so or not, it is still setting Jesus Christ's dying will aside.

¹ in Mounce, Complete Expository Dictionary, page 1257.

² If any such 'surmising' was of vital importance, it is not likely the Lord would not have left us needing to 'surmise it.' More likely, He would have clearly expressed it.

³ By agreeing with them about 'what the Lord wants taught,' one would be saying that they are right. This gratifies their pride. This is why they are so willing to be such fighting 'warriors': the cause for which they fight gratifies their pride.

There are plenty of 'warriors for the Lord' willing to fight against followers of the Lord based upon what the 'warriors' think the Lord wants taught. Matthew 5:9 documents Jesus Christ stating "Blessed are the peacemakers" (ASV). What is needed in the Lord's cause is more people who will do what He expressly commends.

The reality is that Jesus Christ said at John 17:20-1a during His death experience "Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word, that they may all be one" (ASV). Many people surmise their own teachings about 'what the Lord wants taught.' Even if such teachings are actually accurate, it would not follow that the Lord wants His express statement here set aside for such teachings.

Jesus Christ said at John 17:20-1a during His death experience "Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word, that they may all be one" (ASV). Many people surmise their own teachings about 'what the Lord wants us to teach.' They insist that every member of the Lord's church should adopt their teachings on this, and seek 'unwarm' separations from Christians who will not adopt their teachings on 'what the Lord wants taught.' Not only do they set aside what Jesus said at John 17:20-1a, they believe that the Lord is 'on their side' in so doing! Essentially, based upon these teachings that mortals have surmised, these people think that not only can they set aside Jesus Christ's express statement at John 17:20-1a, but also that Jesus Christ is pleased with them doing so! When it is put this succinctly, it seems highly unlikely.

Jesus Christ died for His church. He gave up His sinlessness to bear the wrath of God for all Christians' sins. It is not too much for us to set aside our desires to have our own teachings about 'what the Lord wants taught' promoted in His church. At John 17:20-1a Jesus Christ prayed while enduring His death experience "Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word, that they may all be one" (ASV). Let us set aside our desires to be agreed with, and make united efforts to enact Christ's teachings.

To Christians who wish to do as Jesus Christ prayed at John 17:20-1a, beware that resistance exists among church people. You will find that there are church people who are not open to doing as Jesus Christ prayed at John 17:20-1a for varying reasons. You can expect that congregations led by such persons will not support your effort to do as Jesus Christ prayed at John 17:20-1a. You may have to make your own effort as an individual Christian. If you are resisted, stand strong.

Do not go on a campaign that disrupts the life of a congregation. If your congregation is controlled by factious entities, attempt to simply conduct yourself peacefully as a Christian among them who follows the Bible's commands on unity and against factiousness. There may be cases where their resistance hinders your service to the Lord. In those cases, the proper course of action is to consider attending another congregation. Whatever choices you must make, be unyielding in your commitment to follow Scripture's teachings on unity.

If you wish to do as Jesus Christ prayed at John 17:20-1a, many church people who prefer to set aside John 17:20-1a will treat you like you are doing wrong. They may try to convince you that you are doing wrong. They may try to pass onto you the self-excusing rationalizations that they have accepted. They may not always be nice. They may accuse you of 'not caring about the truth.' They may accuse of you of 'approving of error.' Amazingly, they of all people may even have the audacity to accuse you of being 'less than fully' committed to Jesus Christ. Take heart: you are seeking to do what Jesus Christ expressly said He wants. Remember that.

Contrary to what many people think, 'at church' is not the only place to be Christian. Jesus Christ's teachings have relevance to all of life, and church assembly is just a handful of hours out of the 168 hours in a calendar week. Because Jesus Christ's teachings have relevance to all of life, His teachings can and should be enacted in overall life. At John 17:20-1a Jesus Christ prayed while enduring His death experience "Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word, that they may all be one" (ASV). Let us Christians make united efforts to enact Jesus Christ's teachings in overall life. ■