

To all Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Roman Catholics, and members of other church groups:

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These are trying times. People of faith are being pulled in many directions. The recent vote in the United Methodist Conference in St. Louis, Missouri is just one recent example of the spiritual struggles that are occurring among many church groups. And if these struggles are happening in entire fellowships, then they are definitely happening in the hearts of individuals. Churches are fracturing and hearts are breaking over many issues; issues that did not plague us in days past.

A couple of decades ago the worship wars began over contemporary and traditional styles, and these have yet to be laid to rest. The results have been division and ill-will. The debate continues; it's just that we've grown used to it.

Similar upheaval has occurred in church groups over the role of women in church

leadership. There have been divisions related to Biblical inspiration and inerrancy. Perhaps ugliest of all have been the scandals that have rocked Catholicism and mainline denominations over child sexual abuse.

In some ways, a church skirting the edges of Biblical adherence has always been at war with itself. I suppose this is because a church is comprised both of those who are seeking the Lord *and* those who were sincerely seeking something *other* than the Lord. Such distinct points of view create an atmosphere that is uncomfortable at best and volatile at worst.

Tension has existed in churches for years. Five of the seven churches of Asia were dealing with issues that were incompatible with the Lord's will (Revelation 2-3). The Lord's solution was not for church members to meet in conference to hear speeches, and to eventually be swayed to vote their consciences. Listen to the Lord's continual call: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the *Spirit says to the churches*" (emphasis mine; Rev.2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). But where might one hear the Spirit's voice? His voice can be decidedly heard in the pages of inspiration (2 Tim.3:16-17; 1 Pet.1:22-23).

Every time we hear of a conference or committee vote on some spiritual or moral issue in our churches, we should be immediately suspicious that fallible human beings are usurping Divine prerogatives. We should at least consider the possibility that another gospel is being promoted in such circumstances, and if so we want to stand clear of the Lord's judgment (Gal.1:6-10). Even if a vote comes out on the side of Scripture, what has been gained? How we got to this place raises frightening concerns: Is this the way God intends for such questions to be settled? What happens if the vote doesn't go in the Lord's direction next time?

In years past, I suppose most church members believed that the church existed primarily for the glory of God and that this glory should be sought on the basis of Scripture. This is the way church business was conducted in the denomination I was reared in as a child and teenager. This high ideal was grounded squarely in a high view of Scripture and Scripture's purpose.

But today, often adherence to the Scriptures is no longer the principal concern. Many churches are in the midst of internal upheaval because the Bible has been pushed to the side in favor of emotion and experience (all the while, it is said, "emotion" and "experience" are the promptings of God's Spirit). Many churches have now created the impossible situation where the alleged promptings of the Spirit are in competition with the inspired statements of the Spirit. No wonder younger generations are leaving churches *en masse* for secular pursuits prompted by the flesh.

If you are a member of a church or fellowship that appears to have lost its purpose amid scandal and conflict, perhaps it is time to take a step back and consider where you stand with God. Each church member must decide for himself (herself) whether God is going to be first, or somewhere else down the list. This is not the time to withdraw from God or His church. Quite the opposite. It is time to pursue God as never before. The Lord is calling you to seek Him, in the hope that you will “find Him, though He is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:27). The call of Christ is not just to the heathen; it is also to churches and church members.

If you feel increasingly out of place in your church or denomination, I want you to know that God longs to give you answers and direction. The way of the Lord is life and peace. With God as our helper, you and I can discover what He wants us to know about the meaning of life, how to be saved from sin, how to find peace in relationships, and what He wants us to believe concerning the church.

[Send us a message](#). There is a way to navigate through the darkness of spiritual confusion and conflict. The Lord will show you the way.

“Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.” (Isaiah 55:6-7)