

AMOS 3:3
GREAT QUESTIONS OF LIFE:
DO TWO WALK TOGETHER, UNLESS THEY HAVE AGREED TO MEET?

“Do two walk together,
unless they have agreed to meet?”¹

God had blessed His ancient people. However, despite His rich blessings, they chose to rebel. God makes it clear that He is left with no option except judgement. The question selected as the text for the message today, is actually one of a series of questions the prophet asked of the people. Look at the full account of questions posed to the people.

“Do two walk together,
unless they have agreed to meet?
Does a lion roar in the forest,
when he has no prey?
Does a young lion cry out from his den,
if he has taken nothing?
Does a bird fall in a snare on the earth,
when there is no trap for it?
Does a snare spring up from the ground,
when it has taken nothing?
Is a trumpet blown in a city,
and the people are not afraid?
Does disaster come to a city,
unless the LORD has done it?”

[AMOS 3:3-6]

Let’s look at each of these questions, answering them as we read them.

“Do two walk together,
unless they have agreed to meet?”

The obvious answer is, “No, assuredly not!”

“Does a lion roar in the forest,
when he has no prey?”

Again, the reader who is even somewhat conversant with the lions of the Judean desert would respond, “Of course not.”

“Does a young lion cry out from his den,
if he has taken nothing?”

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Yet again, the expected answer is, “No, emphatically no.” Just so, the next two questions, included for emphasis demand that the reader respond with a resounding “No!”

“Does a bird fall in a snare on the earth,
when there is no trap for it?
Does a snare spring up from the ground,
when it has taken nothing?”

At this point, there is a change in the questions asked. Almost without warning, Amos changes the question to one which anticipates a positive response.

“Is a trumpet blown in a city,
and the people are not afraid?”

Of course, those living in the city would be fearful should the warning trumpet be blown—it would mean an enemy had been sighted. Then, the prophet poses a final query that again demands a positive answer.

“Does disaster come to a city,
unless the LORD has done it?”

When disaster strikes a city, God has permitted it.

There is a progression from a general question that seems almost innocuous or academic, to a question concerning meeting two animals, to a question of birds and a human trap, to a final climactic question concerning confrontation with Holy God. The theme developed as each question is posed in turn is disaster—especially for the one confronted by the question.

In this message this day, I am focusing on the initial question. It is the most general of all the questions. Bear in mind, however, where God’s interlocutor is moving. He is warning Israel of a disastrous meeting because they have rejected God. The questions posed could readily be applied to the western world in this day.

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTHS — Some years ago, a fellow pastor asked why I had not attended any ministerial meetings in the community in which we lived. I knew him to be a good man who loved God; I knew that this pastor wanted to honour the Lord God. I also knew that he was terribly frustrated that his congregation was scarcely interested in the things of the Word. When he approached me with his question, I asked if he truly wanted to know my reason, or whether he was merely making polite inquiry. He assured me that he genuinely wanted to know why I had not accepted any of numerous invitations to attend a ministerial meeting.

I asked for a copy of their doctrinal statement. After skirting the issue for some time, he finally terminated the conversation by stating that I was judgemental. He assured me that the ministerial did have a doctrinal statement, but he was uncertain if he could get a copy immediately. We discussed this matter for over four years, and he never did produce a copy of the doctrinal statement by which the ministerial agreed to co-operate. Eventually, he resigned his charge and moved to a distant city where he now pastors. We still see one another occasionally. Oh, his successor took up the effort to extend invitations when he had ceased.

It is meaningless to say, “Well, we agree to the Apostle’s Creed” (or the Nicene Creed), if that Creed is then interpreted in such a manner as to neuter its intent. It is common for Ministerial Associations to agree to the position that members believe the Bible “as interpreted by Jesus.” This allows sufficient “wobble room” to permit anyone to claim to be a Christian without holding to Christian doctrine.

On one occasion a fellow pastor invited me to a special meeting that was to be held at one of the larger churches in the community. The churches were uniting for what was called a night of prayer for Christian unity. I assured him that I did pray for Christian unity, but I would neither promote the meeting within my congregation, nor would I participate. He feigned shock, asking why I would be so adamantly opposed to such a “good” activity.

I asked if a particular pastor would be participating, receiving his assurance that she was co-operating. I then inquired about another pastor within the community. Again, he assured me that she also would be participating. I commented that his answer provided sufficient reason for my negative response. The former denied the Bible to be the Word of God and openly denied that Jesus is very God. Moreover, she commended setting apart to pastoral ministries people who were living in open defiance of godliness. The latter agreed with the former in denying the virgin birth of Christ and the miraculous. Neither believed there was any such thing as salvation.

“Brother,” I gently asked, “do you believe as they believe?” He assured me that he did not so believe. “Well, here is the problem. I stand on Sunday morning and declare ‘hell hot, eternity long, sin black, Christ the power of God and salvation by faith in Him.’ Then, you would have me on Sunday evening wrap my arms around these two critters and say, ‘These are my sisters; we worship the same god and believe the same things.’ Isn’t it logical that engaging in such action that is obviously contrary to what I preach will only serve to confuse my people?”

Now get this! He said, “Mike, I agree with you; but if I took that stand it would cause problems with my deacons.” In other words, he was quite prepared to be orthodox in the pulpit and heterodox in life. Were his position the exception, it would be serious enough. However, it is increasingly apparent that this is the majority position defining contemporary Christendom. The Faith has become eclectic; it has transmogrified into a pragmatic belief system in which the professor espouses whatever is necessary for momentary peace. Today, the teaching of the Word is treated much as one might approach a cafeteria meal. We take a little of this, because it is easy to digest. We take some of that, it will keep us regular. We’ll fill the plate with some of that because it is so sweet and pleasant. We won’t have any of that, it is tough to chew and will upset the stomach. And we will sprinkle a little pixie dust over all to make it palatable.

This cafeteria approach to religion lends horrifying insight into the present condition in which the Faith exists in light of a parable that the Master told his disciples on one occasion. Jesus said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’ For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.’” Then, the Master said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily.” The Master then appended this chilling commentary to the parable He had just delivered—chilling because it obviously applies to this generation poised on the cusp of eternity! “Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth” [LUKE 18:2-8]? Will He find the faith on earth? One can only wonder at how we should answer the Master’s question!

It is vital to establish this truth in the mind of all who will follow the Master in this day. As Christians, we fellowship—with the Master, with a denomination, with a church, with other Christians—on the basis of doctrine. Christian fellowship is always dependent upon doctrine. The Apostle of Love has instructed those who would follow the Master and who would please Him, “Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works” [2 JOHN 9-11]. While there assuredly is room for disagreement on many issues, on foundational truths there is no room for disagreement.

Before moving on in considering application of this truth, let’s establish what those foundational doctrines are. John says that the Doctrine of Christ is essential for fellowship. Therefore, those doctrines that directly point us to Christ Jesus the Lord are foundational—these doctrines define the Christian Faith. The doctrines in view are as follows: Jesus Christ is very God is human form; He was born of a virgin; He gave His life as a sacrifice because of man’s sinful condition; He conquered death by rising from the dead; He ascended into Glory where He is seated at the right hand of the Father; He is coming again to take to Himself all who have faith in Him as the Risen, Reigning Lord of Glory; all who believe this truth without any dependence upon their own effort or merit are born from above and into His Family; and the foundation for all that we hold as essential is the written Word of God, which is received as authoritative and accurate. These truths define us as Christians; and these truths form the basis for fellowship.

Let me state quite plainly, though I want to be gentle in stating this nonnegotiable fact—anyone who denies these essential truths cannot be considered Christian. It matters not how pious such an individual may present herself or himself, if they deny these truths they are not Christian. It matters not how diligently an individual may labour, how much an individual may deprive himself, how much an individual may profess love for the Master, if that person denies any of these truths, they are denying the heart of the Faith. Such a person falls under the apostolic censure and is not to be welcomed as one who follows the Master! We must not give false hope or encouragement to any unbeliever who denies the heart of this most holy Faith!

DOCTRINAL FIDELITY AND DIVINE COMMUNION — Those who do not hold to the Faith cannot anticipate communion with the Holy One. In the Proverbs, some startling statements are found. One is quite pointed in confronting those who are described as “wicked.”

“The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD,
but the prayer of the upright is acceptable to him.”

[PROVERBS 15:8]

The same theme is iterated soon after this, when the Wise Man writes:

“The LORD is far from the wicked,
but he hears the prayer of the righteous.”

[PROVERBS 15:29]

Who are the wicked? According to my understanding of the Word, the wicked are those who are far from God; consequently, God is far from them. The wicked are those who have refused to embrace the truth and who do not walk according to the revealed mind of God!

These stern warnings that Solomon penned are but an iteration of something that David, Solomon's father, undoubtedly taught him. You will recall that David wrote in the Psalms:

“The face of the LORD is against those who do evil,
to cut off the memory of them from the earth.”

[PSALM 34:16]

I cannot read these warnings without thinking of yet another warning which Solomon penned. “Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil” [ECCLESIASTES 5:1]. You may recall that David quoted what was even then an ancient proverb when he was pursued by Saul, “Out of the wicked comes wickedness” [see 1 SAMUEL 24:13].

It is vital that we establish a truth—a truth that renders us uncomfortable, but a truth we dare not neglect. Those who are wicked are dwelling in darkness. Their minds are blinded by the god of this world. Long years before the Apostle of Love wrote, Isaiah declared: “They will say to you, ‘Seek oracles at the pits used to conjure up underworld spirits, from the magicians who chirp and mutter incantations. Should people not seek oracles from their gods, by asking the dead about the destiny of the living?’ Then you must recall the LORD’s instructions and the prophetic testimony of what would happen. Certainly they say such things because their minds are spiritually darkened” [ISAIAH 8:19-22 NET BIBLE]. Mankind’s best thoughts and his most dedicated spiritual efforts are destined to disappoint. In a similar fashion, no one should anticipate that the darkened minds of those who live as though God were a mere convenience, or even as though He was a mere name, will ever usher in paradise on earth. Politicians and religious leaders without the Spirit of God can only lead us into still greater darkness.

We must not look to the lost for enlightenment. Paul has written: “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools” [ROMANS 1:18-22].

This is a description that the Apostle will use later when writing the Ephesian Encyclical. “You must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity” [EPHESIANS 4:17-19].

A Christian is defined by who he is and not by what he does; however, who one is dictates how that one acts and reacts when challenged by life’s vicissitudes. Who one is, is determined by what one has accepted as true. Doctrine determines relationship. This contention is tacitly held by all professing Christians, though it is practised by few. In the political world, we have no difficulty understanding this truth. One who claims to be a Conservative is expected to adhere to conservative principles. One who identifies herself as a Socialist should be expected to hold socialist policies. We are comfortable in our belief that a Canadian holds, or should hold, certain truths inviolate; we believe a Canadian should hold a measure of love for his or her land. Moreover, we expect that a Canadian should have a desire to promote justice and to seek peace.

Though these truths are readily apparent in the geopolitical realm, preachers are less comfortable espousing the same truth in the realm of the spiritual. The mere claim that one is a Christian is usually sufficient to halt all questions concerning who that one is. However, I am adamant that merely saying that one is a Christians does not validate the claim. Merely claiming to believe that Jesus lived does not make one a Christian. How else should we understand John's warning? "I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says 'I know him' but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked" [1 JOHN 2:1-6].

This brings me back to the emphasis that must be stressed—doctrinal fidelity is essential for divine communion. Each professing Christian is well advised to remember these words spoken by the Master when on one occasion He challenged some who avowed fidelity to Him and to His cause. The passage deserves being underlined in your Bible and memorised so it is integrated into daily life for each child of God. Jesus asked, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you" [LUKE 6:46]? The essential message is that our relationship to the One we call Master is dependent upon doctrinal fidelity.

Think of the times the Master emphasised the relationship of obedience and communion. "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him" [JOHN 3:36].

Listen to this compilation of statements delivered by the Master. "If anyone hears my words and does not obey them, I do not judge him. For I have not come to judge the world, but to save the world" [JOHN 12:47 NET BIBLE].

Again, "If you love me, you will obey my commandments" [JOHN 14:15 NET BIBLE].

Jesus also said, "The person who has my commandments and obeys them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and will reveal myself to him" [JOHN 14:21 NET BIBLE].

Again, listen to what the Master says. "If anyone loves me, he will obey my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and take up residence with him. The person who does not love me does not obey my words. And the word you hear is not mine, but the Father's who sent me" [JOHN 14:23, 24 NET BIBLE].

I give but one final example of Jesus' teaching. "If you obey my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commandments and remain in his love" [JOHN 15:10 NET BIBLE].

There is but one conclusion to draw from these multiple statements: there is no communion, no fellowship, with God if there is no doctrinal fidelity. We are obligated to adhere to Jesus' teaching, following Him and seeking always to do His will if we will enjoy sweet fellowship with Him and with the Father. This is especially evident when we recall the opening words of John's first letter. "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" [1 JOHN 1:1-3].

DOCTRINAL FIDELITY AND DENOMINATIONAL CO-OPERATION — As I have already established, in the Second Letter bearing his name, the Apostle provides instruction concerning our fellowship; what is written bears directly on this point we will now consider. “I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father. And now I ask you, dear lady—not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning—that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it. For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward. Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works” [2 JOHN 4-11].

If you have not done so before, take your pen and underscore **VERSES 9 THROUGH 11**. Fellowship, co-operation between those who profess the Name of Christ the Lord, is based upon doctrine. Without this foundation, there is no fellowship. This assertion flies in the face of contemporary Christian attitudes. We are trained to hold to a denomination or the name if some movement, believing that the mere attachment of that name suffices for fellowship.

In studying the history of denominations and movements, I note a progression that appears to hold throughout history and to this day. Great religious movements begin with people holding to doctrinal truths that distinguish them as those who follow the Master. Early in the history of every great movement, adherents are marked by doctrinal fidelity. As time passes, a spiritual malaise sets in. With time, the denomination or the movement begins to protect the institutions it has created—the name of the movement is more important than the Name of the Master. As more time passes, people begin to excuse doctrinal deviation. “Well, yes, he is a bit wobbly on the Faith; but he supports our cause.” “Yes, she is teaching some strange things, but we don’t want to discourage those who support her, and we don’t want to appear exclusive.” Eventually, though the movement is withering and the membership is declining, those who have insinuated themselves into positions of power are prepared to embrace more and more deviant doctrine in order to keep the movement “alive.” By this point, there is little reason for the vibrant Christian to maintain a relationship with the denomination or the movement.

Have you not heard the apostolic plea? “Do not become partners with those who do not believe, for what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship does light have with darkness? And what agreement does Christ have with Beliar? Or what does a believer share in common with an unbeliever? And what mutual agreement does the temple of God have with idols? For we are the temple of the living God, just as God said, ‘I will live in them and will walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.’” Therefore “come out from their midst, and be separate,” says the Lord, “and touch no unclean thing, and I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters,” says the All-Powerful Lord” [2 CORINTHIANS 6:14-18 NET BIBLE].

The Christian that remains yoked to a dead movement must answer Him who appoints His people to life. What answer can we give if we are united with those who are willing to compromise the Faith for the sake of momentary peace? And what concession will suffice to ensure that no further concessions must be made?

Benjamin Franklin is quoted as saying, “They who can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety.” In that vein, I am prepared to say that the one who compromises integrity (essential doctrine) for peace will have neither integrity nor peace. Surely, the censure of the prophet rests of those who compromise:

“‘Peace, peace, to the far and to the near,’ says the LORD,
 ‘and I will heal him.
 But the wicked are like the tossing sea;
 for it cannot be quiet,
 and its waters toss up mire and dirt.
 There is no peace,’ says my God, ‘for the wicked.’”

[ISAIAH 57:19-21]

God condemns the one who is lax in carrying out His work. God, through Jeremiah, has warned, “A curse on anyone who is lax in doing the LORD’s work” [JEREMIAH 48:10 NET BIBLE]! Eugene Peterson has captured the powerful thrust of Jeremiah’s words by translating the passage, “Sloppy work in God’s name is cursed” [JEREMIAH 48:10 THE MESSAGE]. May God deliver us from seeking comity with those who deny the Faith. Even though a movement or a denomination attempts to appropriate the Name of the Son of God to himself or herself, the group that has eschewed doctrinal fidelity ensures that there can be no denominational co-operation.

Ask yourself this thought-provoking question. What religious institution or denomination has survived so long as 100 years without significant deviation from the founding principles? Once the founding principles have been compromised the denomination moved steadily toward dissolution and ruin. Perhaps there was a momentary halt in the steady march to insignificance; but soon, within less than a generation the movement would again embrace error and move toward dissolution.

Ask yourself which of the great denominations that once shaped a nation for righteousness continues vibrant and alive today? A friend of mine, an Anglican rector, once spoke wistfully of the days of his youth when the Bishop of British Columbia would proclaim a Day of Prayer and the Legislature would suspend business for the day to pray. “Now,” he opined, “we no longer pray. It is the Baptists and the Pentecostals who shape public opinion.” Frankly, he gave far too much credit to these groups. For far too many of us who bear the title of Pastor, claiming to serve as undershepherd for congregations known as Evangelical, our denominations and movements have been so compromised by the infiltration of lifeless people posing as religious leaders that we have no power either with man or with God.

When did a denomination last meet to pray rather than merely flinging a hasty plea heavenward in order to get to really serious business of securing more money or spending what isn’t there in the first place? When did denominational leaders last lead a soul to Christ rather than merely talking about leading people to join a church within their communion?

I’m sometimes reminded of the old southern saint who was part of a tour group visiting Westminster Abbey. As the tour was being guided through the great building, pointing to the Stone of Scone, the guide spoke of kings and queens who had been crowned—from William the Conqueror to the present queen. He guided the tour to the Poet’s Corner, speaking of the great and powerful of Great Britain buried there. He named Chaucer, Browning, Handel, Dickens, Tennyson and Kipling, each interred there. He pointed to the memorials for Blake, Bronte, Austen, Burns and Carroll, each noted for their contribution to English literature.

As he paused in his commentary, permitting the knowledge of such honoured people to sink into the consciousness of the tour members, the dear old southern lady could stand no more. “Young man,” she sternly challenged, “enough of your chatter. I want to know if anyone has been saved recently.” Perhaps it would be a good question to ask in every denominational assembly or meeting within the various religious movements. When it takes almost one hundred professing Christians to see one soul profess Christ, can it be that we have forgotten who we are? Is it possible that we do not know who we are because we no longer believe Him and His Word?

Again, the question is posed to the conscientious child of God, “Do two walk together, unless they have agreed to meet” [AMOS 3:3]? Rephrasing that question, the NET Bible asks, “Do two walk together without having met?” There must be agreement, and when the child of God continues within a degenerate denomination or within a moribund movement, it will be the child of God who must lower expectations. Never does the dying denomination ennoble the child of God or strengthen the resolve of the Christian. All that the mortally ill movement can do is draw the saint downward, ensuring that she is rendered ineffectual in righteousness.

DOCTRINAL FIDELITY AND DIOCESAN CONCORD —

“Do two walk together,
unless they have agreed to meet?”

There is no communion with the Holy One unless there is doctrinal fidelity. Similarly, there can be no co-operation in righteousness within a movement or within a denomination unless there is doctrinal fidelity. In the same way, congregational concord is impossible if doctrinal fidelity is absent. A church grows and prospers when there is unanimity in the great doctrines of the Faith.

I have often stated that for co-operation in the great areas of evangelism—bringing the lost to faith—and for the work of establishing moral and ethical standards within a society, there must be agreement on the foundational truths of the Faith. The reason great evangelistic movements often have results that fail to last is because those co-operating in the venture had no agreement in the Faith of Christ the Lord. For co-operation between churches to advance the Kingdom of God through planting new churches and establishing believers, there must also be agreement in the doctrine of the church. A church that insists upon adherence to rite and ritual as necessary for salvation will not be able to co-operate with a congregation that is insistent that all rites are performed only after one has come to faith. Such disparate views of church conduct militate against co-operation in these endeavours. Denominations that seek to preserve the institutions rather than to advance the cause of Christ are not noted for their ability to change the world or to shed Christ’s light into the darkness. Likewise, a congregation must agree substantially upon a broad range of doctrine in order to support and build one another.

Churches in this day seem to confuse form with substance; they appear to imagine that unity arises from worship. Thus “worship teams” replace the preaching of the Word, and musicians become the ministers. However, worship that fails to instruct in the will of God is mere emotional excitement; it is transient and doomed to leave the one seeking life disappointed. Such efforts are like strawberries without the berries, just the straw. Why do worship wars erupt in the churches? Isn’t it because some imagine that entertainment will draw and keep a crowd? Remember, a crowd is not a church. A church becomes a church when the people are pointed to Christ and unite in discovering His will as revealed through His Word. In His doctrine that unites and binds a people together before the True and Living God.

Other churches imagine that programs will build unity. However, programming that fails to build the people in this holy Faith is doomed to failure. I fear that we have about programmed the Spirit of God out of the churches. Have you ever heard the couplet:

Mary had a little lamb, a lamb and not a sheep,
it joined the local Baptist church and died of lack of sleep?

Pastors have become CEOs, and business skills are prized by the churches rather than doctrinal fidelity. I've heard the whine from supposed saints, "His preaching is too doctrinal! We don't want doctrine all the time; we want to be affirmed."

I have often cited the apostolic warning as applicable to this day on the cusp of the Master's return. "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry" [2 TIMOTHY 4:1-5].

It is true that our doctrine is Christ. However, Christ is revealed through His Word. Whenever a denomination, or a congregation, or an individual ignores the Word, they cannot know Christ. It has pleased God through the Word to reveal His power and to present His Son that all might have life. If you are part of a denomination that gives lip service to Christ, but denies Him through failing to present His will, you are part of the problem. If you are united to a congregation that twists the Word to suit the darkened mind of modern man, you are dishonouring God. If you are even now beginning to drift from adhering to this Word, substituting your own desires as the mind of God, you are under divine censure.

The Apostle has warned us, "You know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires" [ROMANS 13:11-14].

Again, he has cautioned the people of God, "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is" [EPHESIANS 5:15-17].

I dare not conclude without asking whether you know the Master. Is it possible that you have no respect for the will of God because you do not know Him? Your great need is to be born from above and into the Family of God. The True and Living God now invites all who are willing to do so to come to life as you place your faith in the Son of God. "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." Citing the Prophet Joel, God extends this gracious offer of life when He promises, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" [ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13]. Believe and be saved, even this day. Amen.