

A CHURCH THAT COULD CARE LESS

Someone has observed that in a world that couldn't care less, Christians are people who couldn't care more. True enough. But consider this twist. Maybe Christians should be people who couldn't care less! A number of years ago I ran across a short article that reported the bulletin of a church in a small town carried this message on the front page: "The Church That Could Care Less." Turning the page, the message continued, "We could care less where you come from. We could care less where you've been. We could care less what you have. The thing we really do care about is you, and so does God." Wow! What a great twist on a great truth! In an uncaring world, Christians are to be people who love and care.

Sometimes congregations and Christians forget that. Some stray into believing the only thing that matters in religion is being "right" about what we believe. We are constantly reminded of the importance of being a "sound" church and preaching "sound doctrine." Let me assure you, I have no desire to detract from that emphasis. In fact, one of the things that attracted me more than thirty-five years ago, and which continues to thrill my soul to this day, is the widespread desire and emphasis in many churches of Christ to "buy the truth, and sell it not" (Proverbs 23:23a). Congregations and Christians who have no desire or concern to be "sound" are in great danger of drifting away from the truth into fables and false doctrines (2 Timothy 4:1-5). What I want to take issue with in this article is the notion that a church (or preacher or elder or any other Christian) is "sound" and pleasing to God simply on the basis that it knows and believes and preaches truth in the absence of love. In 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 the apostle Paul uses the phrase "but have not love" three times to remind us even the most extreme expressions of religiosity add up to a big fat zero if devoid of love. Read those verses and you will be reminded that religious practice without love is also without profit. It is possible to sing without the instrument, pray and preach and do the Lord's Supper and give financially in a way that is outwardly true to the Word — and yet not profit spiritually at all. Let me say it loud and let me say it clear — an unloving preacher, elder, Christian, or congregation is not "sound" according to the Bible. If you're still not convinced, read Revelation 2:1-7 where Jesus acknowledged that the church of Christ at first century Ephesus was a hard-working, sin-hating, clean-living, Bible-believing, lie-opposing, teacher-testing, truth-loving, doctrinally sound, untiring, persevering church that was stubbornly standing fast for the truth. But there is a fly in the sugar-bowl! Jesus told this church, "Nevertheless, I have this against you, that you have left your first love" (verse 4). He describes this congregation as having "fallen" and calls on them to repent (verse 5). I'm not suggesting that we love the truth less — I'm urging us to love people more. While a church may love without fully practicing the truth, no church can fully practice the truth and not love.

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