

**Sept. 12, 2012**

**Question:** What does a person do when their grown child in their 20's leaves the church for so called non-denominational organizations that obviously are offspring of denominations with still some or much false teaching?

**Answer:** Let me say how sorrow I am for the pain and heartbreak you are experiencing. No matter how hard we try to bring our children up in "the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4), there are no guarantees. Yes, Proverbs 22:6 says: "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it." This is not a hard and fast rule, but a generalization to which there are exceptions. So, don't blame yourself. Sometimes, children with solid backgrounds in the church turn from the truth, and others with no biblical training come to know the truth and embrace it.

There are some very positive things you can do. Pray for you child every day. I suspect you are already doing that, but don't despair. Never underestimate the power of God to change hearts and attitudes.

Keep the lines of communication open. When opportunity presents itself, have conversations about what led to the change. Ask what they saw in the church which they found objectionable, and what there is in the non-denominational church which they find appealing. Do so with a genuine desire to understand, not to antagonize. Ask if they are making decisions based on biblical teaching or on personal feelings. Also, seek to determine how much they are being guided by their friends, and how much they have been influenced by culture and academia. Learn to listen more effectively and you will be able to respond more productively.

Prepare yourself for loving discussions by developing a better knowledge of the Scriptures. Be prepared to address some of the following:

- 1) The church of Christ is just another denomination. If so, where is our earthly head? Where is our earthly headquarters? When was the church born if not at Pentecost (Acts 2)?
- 2) Our fellowship is too narrow, restrictive, and judgmental. If one believes the Bible, the idea that most people will eventually be saved is absolutely indefensible (Matthew 7:13, 14; Luke 13:23, 24). Our emphasis is not on who is right, but what is right. We do not sit in judgment of anyone. Only the Lord is judge! The world argues that there are many ways to God, but the Word says that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6).
- 3) We place too much emphasis on works. This is a charge from those who believe that salvation is by faith alone. This idea comes not from Scripture, but from Reformation history. The Bible clearly teaches that salvation is by faith (Hebrews 11:6), but never does it assert that it is a matter of faith alone. That is a purely denominational concept (James 2:14-26)!
- 4) We don't understand grace. This charge is also false. One cannot believe the Bible and reject the role of grace in our salvation. None of us deserve to be saved. We are all sinners (Romans 3:23). It is only by the grace of God that we may be saved. We are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:5-10), but that text does not say we are saved by grace alone, or faith alone.

5) Baptism is not essential to salvation. We do not believe that water cleanses. That is the role of the blood of Christ (Ephesians 1:7; Revelation 1:5). But when are we saved? The correct answer is that we are saved when we respond to God's grace in obedient faith and are baptized for the remission of our sins (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21).

6) We take the Bible too literally. Yes, we still believe the Bible to be the inspired, authoritative, all-sufficient, inerrant word of God (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). We do not believe that it is outdated or irrelevant. Nor, do we believe that it is subject to the will of the majority or changes with the times to conform to modern culture.

*Note:* These are all denominational views, many of which are held by so-called non-denominational churches.

There are also some things to avoid. Don't badger your son or daughter thinking that you can wear them down. That kind of action will only lead to withdrawal, resentment, and a refusal to discuss the issue further.

Be careful not to lose your temper and say things you will later regret. Always communicate your love for them, and let them know that you will always be there for them. If God still loves us, even when we have rejected Him, then surely we must love our children even when they disappoint us. However, our love must not lead us to ignore sin or overlook spiritual problems in their lives.

Be patient. No one wakes up one morning and suddenly decides to abandon their core beliefs for other beliefs. This is normally a long process, and it may take a long time to win them back to the truth. Do not become discouraged!

Remember, this is not a problem unique to you. Many parents have had similar experiences, and many are dealing with these same issues right now. Keep your faith! Continue to study God's word. Pray often. And, don't lose hope. Many a prodigal has returned to the Father, and I pray your son or daughter will do the same. Be there to greet them and celebrate their return to the family (Luke 15:11-32).