

## DOCTRINE BY POPULAR VOTE?

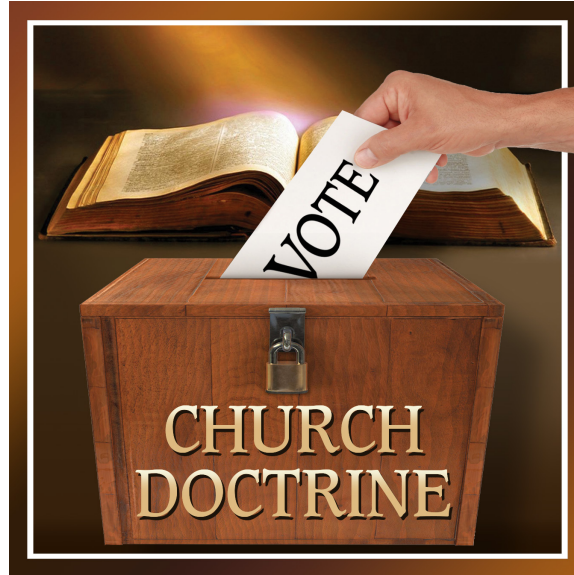
*“...henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine...” — Ephesians 4:14*

In a November 1, 2013 article, *Religion News Service* wrote: *“In an unusual move, the Vatican has asked the world’s bishops to quickly canvas the faithful for their views on topics like gay marriage, divorce and birth control ahead of a major meeting of church leaders... to help set priorities for the October 2014 synod...”*

Whether topics such as these will affect a change in doctrinal stance by the Roman Church remains to be seen, but it does bring up an issue for serious consideration. Doctrinal relativism based upon popular opinion is, indeed, an issue which has been sweeping the Christian world over the past century, and it has become increasingly more invasive as many churches scramble to keep their congregations contented and intact. But, is a Christian’s doctrine to be fashioned after every wind of popular thought, or is it to be based purely on the stable principles that God has set forth in His Word? In the permissive climate of our day, it is vital for each of us to evaluate whether we have allowed our doctrinal convictions to drift off course by the ever changing standards of the world.

### DOCTRINAL RELATIVISM IS NOTHING NEW

This idea of doctrinal relativism is not new. The Apostle Paul preached tirelessly in his epistles to the early church congregations, warning them to keep the doctrine of Christ pure from the spirit and customs of the world. *“...it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”* (Jude 3) Even with powerful admonitions such as this, after the Apostles fell asleep in death, doctrinal purity eroded quickly. Within a few short centuries, spiritual eyesight was so blurred that the majority of Christians did not discern the danger of turning their congregations over to powerful and ambitious men. Emperor Constantine, for example, in an attempt to set up a Christian empire, compromised with pagan practices and doctrines which were entrenched in the society of his day. This compromise undermined true faith and brought in all manner of doctrinal errors. Those who sought to defend the purity of the doctrine of Christ were shunned as subversives.



From the time of Constantine on, the organized Roman Church continued to stray so far away from the pure Word of God that the leadership even condoned persecuting and killing Christians who spoke out against that powerful church system! By laying aside the Scriptures, the most basic of doctrines given to the Christian was completely ignored: *“Love your enemies... That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven...”* Matthew 5:44,45

### THE EFFECT OF MORAL RELATIVISM UPON DOCTRINE

Coming to our day, the Apostle Paul warned that, in the later days, there would be an even greater danger of doctrinal compromise. *“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth...”* (2 Timothy 4:3, 4) And this attitude of carelessness is exactly what we see today. In an effort to be *politically correct* and to reach out to everyone, it is not uncommon to see some of today’s churches *turning a blind eye* to all kinds of worldly practices such as social drinking, gambling, unwed couples living together and other forms of what the world calls *alternative lifestyles*. But, Christians have a responsibility to *“Learn not the way of the heathen... For the customs of the people are vain...”* (Jeremiah 10:2,3) *“...walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind... being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart...”* Ephesians 4:17-19

Some churches are advertising for anyone to *“Come as you are.”* Certainly, if one is drawing near to God, God will draw near to the individual who is seeking. But, even though we *come as we are*, God doesn’t want us to *stay as we are*. James counseled: *“Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands... purify your hearts...”* (James 4:8) And the Apostle Paul confirms this saying, *“... be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”* Romans 12:1,2

Because God so loved the world, He set down righteous laws so that His creation might live in health and harmony with one another. Yes, Christians are admonished to *“abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.”* In fact, the Christian should not only obey the moral standards of God’s Word, but in addition, he should be careful that he does not even give the *appearance of evil.* (1 Peter 2:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:22) God’s Word sets before us *moral absolutes* built upon doctrinal purity, and in due time, all of His creation will gladly conform to His Holy likeness.

### THE DEFINITION OF MARRIAGE

One controversial issue today is the definition of marriage. The world’s definition of marriage has been changing, but God’s definition has not changed: *“He which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh.”* (Matthew 19:4-5) This describes the holy union between one man and one woman.

In Ephesians 5:21-33 the Apostle Paul defines a healthy marriage in the bonds of holiness: *“Submit yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ... Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it... no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.”*

Marriage, then, is a covenant between one man and one woman to be faithful to one another in love and honor before God. It pictures the marriage covenant between the true church and her spiritual head, Christ. This holy union between a man and a woman as defined in Scripture is critical in understanding the picture of Christ and his church—his bride. Together they will nourish the world of mankind with the water of truth. We see this beautifully pictured in Revelation 22:17: *“And the Spirit [Christ] and the bride [his church] say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”*

### THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

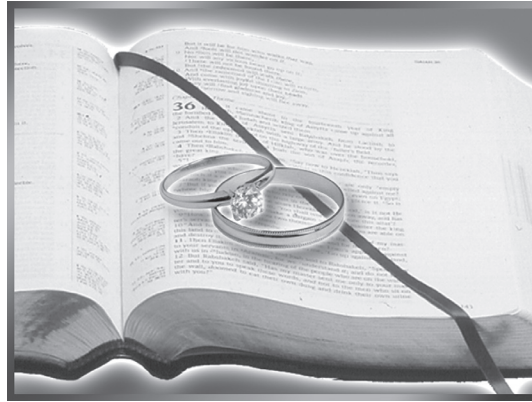
Keeping this word picture of Ephesians 5 in mind, let us consider another debate in the churches — women pastors. Women today are seeking to take a more prominent role in business, religion and politics, and are trying to shed off the oppressive traditions of the past and to become equal partners

in making the world a better place. And rightly so. Women have much to offer and their skills, creativity and sensitivity should be utilized. The Scriptures do not concern themselves about the role of women in politics or the work place. The Scriptures refer only to *a woman’s role in the church.* And so, we must keep this in mind when reading the Apostle Paul’s guidance to the church: *“I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.”* 1 Timothy 2:9-13

So, why were women excluded from the formal teaching and leadership roles? Why did God choose only men to fulfill the prominent positions as teachers throughout the Bible? Why, under the Mosaic Law, were women ineligible from becoming priests and servants of the Tabernacle of Israel? (Exodus 28:1,2,40,41) Despite direct statements that Jesus loved the honorable women who ministered to him, such as Mary and Martha, why did he not select any from among them in choosing his twelve apostles or the seventy evangelists who were sent out later? (John 11:5; Luke 10:1) Why in the early church were the teachers elected by their congregations always limited to men? (Titus 1:5-9; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Ephesians 4:11,12; 1 Corinthians 12:28) And, finally, why were women not only excluded from these and other positions of prominence, but, additionally, why did the Apostle Paul admonish women to *keep silence in the church?*

It is clear that God set this arrangement forth in Scripture for a reason, and if this subject is rightly understood, it provides a beautiful picture of God’s plan for mankind. Again, as brought out in Ephesians 5, the relationship between a man and a woman is a picture of Christ and his beloved bride, the church. *“...the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.”* (1 Corinthians 11:3) This follows the special order in God’s arrangement: God is the final authority of truth — the *head* which does the thinking for all who seek to be His children. He is the head of Christ, and Christ is the head of the church. As his submissive bride, she looks to Christ for wisdom, guidance, support and protection — they have a mutual respect and caring love for one another. God wants us to keep this symbol of Christ’s headship in mind in our marriages, in our holy assemblies of the church, and throughout our daily lives. Therefore, when Paul says in 1 Timothy 2:11-13 *“I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man,”* he is meaning that, in the picture, the church is to learn from her head, Christ.

As to the statement by Paul that a woman is *to be in silence*, a close examination of this word in the Greek brings a more reasonable understanding. In 1 Timothy 2:12, the word *silence* is the Greek word *hesuchia*, which means *stillness*. The masculine form of this Greek word is *hesuchios* and is translated *peaceable* in 1 Timothy 2:2, *“...that we [the church] may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.”* In comparing the many ways these Greek words are used in the Scriptures, we can see that it does not necessarily mean absolute silence, but a *peaceable, meek, quiet spirit.* Therefore, women do not have to





maintain absolute silence in the church, but are encouraged, with a *meek and peaceable spirit*, to participate in studies and prayer within church gatherings.

When Paul said in 1 Corinthians 14:34, 35 that the women should not *speak*, this word in the Greek means an *extended or random harangue*. Paul was saying that the women in the Corinthian congregation were prone to dominating the meetings and that they should learn to be more submissive and control their behavior for the sake of order in the church.

Thus, women are certainly allowed to participate within their congregations and exercise their talents along the line that the Apostle Paul prescribed. Preaching in a more private role as a witness was also encouraged and exemplified by several early church women. (Romans 16:3-12) All of God's anointed are admonished to preach the *good news*: "*The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek...*" (Isaiah 61:1) God makes no distinction between men and women in this matter of private preaching: "*There is neither... male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.*" Galatians 3:28

By Divine appointment, the church is to be submissive to her Lord and respectful of his headship. It would not be appropriate for the church to teach her Lord and Master. Therefore, in setting up the picture of Christ and the church, the woman, symbolizing the church, is not to assume teaching authority over the man, as it would violate this higher relationship instituted by God. In carrying out this picture, only the man is permitted formally to preach and teach along spiritual lines in the services of the congregation. But, it follows that the man must remember the headship of Christ, and that he is to be a *servant* of Christ, and not a *ruler* over the church.

#### "ALTERNATIVE LIFESTYLES"

Another issue that is eroding the purity of doctrine in some congregations is the subject of gay and lesbian lifestyles. The Scriptures are clear that such practices which have become acceptable today, have never been condoned by God. In fact, these are an abhorrence to Him. "*Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination.*" (Leviticus 18:22) And, the Apostle Paul confirms this: "*...God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature... also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly...*" Romans 1:26-28

According to the Scriptures, therefore, the church should condemn this behavior. In considering all of these topics, however, we wish to state emphatically that we are discussing doctrinal principles always — individuals, never. Indeed, the *sin* is always what is condemned and not the *sinner*, and so, if one has this tendency by birth, and seeks to overcome, this person is to be commended as a fellow soldier of Christ for seeking to conquer his or her fleshly weakness.

Another *lifestyle* choice which has become an *accepted norm* in some churches is cohabitation outside of marriage. But the Scriptures speak against *fornication* — premarital relations: "*But fornication, and all uncleanness... let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints...*" (Ephesians 5:3; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11) A surprising number of couples today are choosing to live together rather than get married, because they either do not trust in the *institution* of marriage or they find it easier not to commit to marriage. Even more surprising are the number of churches which ignore and do not admonish the flock. As a consequence, many children are being born to unwed parents *by choice*. According to a *New York Times* Nov. 15, 2013 web posting, in the United States, "*out-of-wedlock births are the 'new normal.'*" *As of 2009, more than half of all children born to women under 30 were born to unmarried women.*"

In a country with freedom of religion and lifestyle, non-Christians are not bound to obey biblical teachings, and, we should not demand such. However, if one is claiming to be following in the footsteps of the Master, then the Scriptures are clear and should be stated so in the church: "*be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation [Greek—manner of life], in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity...*" 1 Timothy 4:12; 2 Corinthians 5:20

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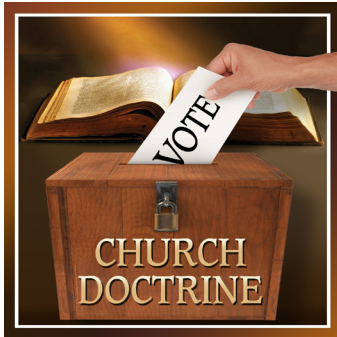
Romans 12:1,2

#### RESPONSIBILITY OF THE SHEPHERDS AND OF THE SHEEP

The Apostle Paul warned, "*...if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?*" (1 Corinthians 14:8) The trumpet of truth should be clear and in tune with the great teacher. Those who have the role as shepherds do the Lord's flock no favor by allowing the standard to be brought down to the level of the world. Rather, "*Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.*" 1 Timothy 4:16

Although the shepherds of the flock are greatly responsible for exhibiting high moral standards in the church, it is also the responsibility of each individual Christian to see to it that he lives in harmony with the standards set forth in the Bible to the best of his ability. A wise man has well said: "*The Christian in the world is like a ship in the ocean. The ship is safe in the ocean so long as the ocean is not in the ship.*" One of the great difficulties with Christianity today is that it has admitted the *strangers*, the "*people of the land*," and recognized them as Christians. (Ezra 10:11) It does injury, not only to the Christians, by lowering their standards—for the *average* will be considered the standard — but it also injures the *strangers*, by causing many of them to believe themselves thoroughly safe and needing no transformation of character. Yes, the world may choose any lifestyle choice it desires, but, if one is seeking to live by Scriptural principles, then let him be "*blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the word of life...*" Philippians 2:15,16

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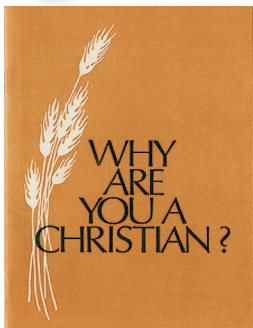
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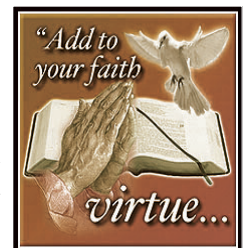
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##### WHAT IS THE ONE TRUE CHURCH

There are hundreds, if not thousands of denominations all claiming to be the one true church, but does God recognize any of these as His representative on earth? This subject should be approached prayerfully and honestly. If there was but one church in the beginning, established by our Lord, there should be but the one church in the end. Colossians 3:4



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