

#### **D. The Practicalities of Our Conclusions**

We now have to contemplate the unpleasant task of deciding what to do with all these new ideas. Do we run out and appoint women teachers, deacons, elders, and preachers? Do we cower in fear of being seen as “liberal” and ignore what the Bible says? What if our congregation would split? What if the churches in your community would disfellowship you? (Contrary to all-too-common practice, there is no scriptural authority for one congregation to disfellowship another.) What if your elders don't even allow material such as this to be considered by the membership? There are many lessons taught by the Bible that bear on these points.

**Divisiveness is a sin.** Being very often a divisive people, as amply evidenced by our history of countless divisions, we have conveniently ignored a dirty little secret: divisiveness is a sin. It is among the worst of all sins.

*(Rom. 16:17) I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.*

*(1 Cor. 3:16-17) Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.*

*(Titus 3:10) Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him.*

This is not ambiguous. Not only is divisiveness a sin, but also we are told that such a person must be disfellowshipped. Now notice carefully that the sin is not that the divisive person is teaching falsely. The lesson in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 comes in the context of the division described in chapter 1, where some members claimed to be of Christ, or of Cephas, or of Apollos, or of Paul. Paul first makes the point that the congregation (“you” is plural in the Greek) is God's temple and that divisions within the congregation destroy the temple. He then pronounces a curse on those who cause such divisions, saying that God will destroy such people. Divisiveness is dividing over our disagreements. It is judging as damned or not worthy of our fellowship those who have been saved but who disagree with us on some point of non-salvation doctrine.

Thus, we cannot allow those who are divisive to set the agenda for the rest of us. We must teach the truth—the whole truth—even if those steeped in the sin of divisiveness don't like it.

**Condoning sin.** One of the more ridiculous ideas held by some within the Church is the notion that by worshipping with a known sinner I somehow “condone” his sin. But, of course, we are all sinners. That's why we need Jesus! The idea that somehow my sins aren't very bad and so don't taint those who worship with me, while the sins of someone who disagrees with me are really bad and so taint the congregation, is an extraordinarily arrogant and wicked notion. When I worship with a sinner, I should be thankful that he is also willing to worship with a sinner, or else I would be all alone in church!