



# The Tri-Cities Edifier

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## CONVICTION & LIFESTYLE CHANGES AMONG BRETHREN

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I think it's safe to say that our reliance on the Word of God without any man-made written creed will inevitably result in differences in our understandings and applications of biblical teaching. Any differences we have among ourselves are not the fault of the revealed Word but a result of our own interpretations of it.

We hold firmly to the principle that the Scriptures are inspired of God and "able to completely equip us for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Unlike many in the religious world, we reject the idea that the gospel message changes with the times. Therefore, any changes in doctrinal positions must be due only to our own previous misunderstandings of the Holy Spirit-inspired text.

The changes discussed in this article are some which I consider to be concerning. Some are subtle changes in long-standing doctrinal positions generally held by brethren, and some are less restrictive applications of moral and lifestyle matters.

### ***Local Loyalty & Commitment***

Of concern to me is what I view as a decline in personal loyalty and commitment to the local congregation. It doesn't seem to take much for some to excuse themselves from worship. What doesn't keep them away

from work, school, or fun activities will often prevent them from being present for assemblies of the saints. Also, the Lord's day has become a convenient day for an impromptu family outing or for the beginning or end of a vacation. Some don't bother to seek out a faithful congregation when traveling away from home. In today's economy, most families' incomes don't vary significantly which means if members are giving "as prospered," the local church could expect its income from offerings to be consistent. Many brethren are good about making up their contributions after being away, but many others are not.

### ***Instrumental Music in Worship***

Churches of Christ are well known for insistence on a cappella music in worship. Yet now more than ever I hear brethren defending the use of musical instruments in worship. It's not that they want to add it to the assembled worship, but they don't see it as unscriptural. There have always been some among us who were unable to fully accept the opposition to this practice but were willing to keep silent on the matter for the sake of unity. I can respect this; but my fear is that if teaching on this subject is not done, we will raise a future generation who will actively advocate for it and force division once again.

### ***One True Church***

When some of our own leave our midst and join themselves to churches that fail to teach the pure gospel concerning salvation (besides many other digressions), some brethren are resistant to any disciplinary action as an attempt to win them back. Sometimes they will even say, "There are Christians in many churches" and defend the choice to have fellowship with error. It may be technically true that there are Christians in such churches, *but that's not where they belong!* There are many places where you may find Christians where they ought not be.

### ***Baptism Into Christ vs. Faith Only***

I hope I'm wrong, but I sense a toning down of emphasis on baptism being for the remission of sins and the point at which one comes "into Christ." There is even the suggestion that we may have misjudged the advocates of the "faith only" doctrine. However, when you read the statements of faith offered by denominations and evangelicals, they make it clear that they believe that "baptism has nothing to do with salvation."

### ***Moderate Drinking***

There was a time when Christians were known for abstinence from the social and recreational use of alcoholic beverages. While I

think that most brethren abstain and even oppose such, there seem to be growing numbers who defend the practice. The argument offered is usually that the biblical prohibition is of drunkenness—not moderate drinking. Jesus’ first “sign” in turning water into wine is offered as proof. What’s interesting to me is that they use this argument to condone not only wine but beer and other intoxicating drinks. They seldom quote the various warnings of wisdom that paint all intoxicating drinks in a negative light (i.e., Prov. 20:1).

#### ***Modest Attire Issues***

With the constant changes in dress and modesty in society in general, the issue of what is modest and what is not has long been an issue of debate among brethren. Generally, Christians tend to adjust their standards of modesty slightly behind the world. Most Christians don’t dress in the most provocative manner but adopt a less noticeable style. What is quite obvious to us “older” folk is that what now seems to be quite acceptable among Christians was once considered immodest. I recall once in my childhood that my family was invited to a picnic in a public park with Christians we didn’t know personally. When one of us asked how we would know which group was “ours,” my dad said, “by the way they’re dressed.” Today, in some cases this is not as clear an indicator.

The change in modesty standards among Christians is not limited to leisurewear. On *Facebook*, it is not unusual to see pictures of wedding attire that is quite revealing. Apparently, some Christians must think that special occasions are exempt from chaste attire.

#### ***Dancing***

Another change that is evident is attitudes toward dancing. Now, I must make clear what most people already know: I’m not talking about all dancing (i.e., for joy, as in the Bible), but about men and women, boys and girls, who are not married to each another, engaging in the sexually provocative kind of dancing that is common at high school proms and formal events.

In the past concerned Christians often would plan wholesome social events for teenagers in their area as an alternative to the prom. In recent years, some have quit hosting such events after they realized that many of the young people were happy to attend the alternative event, but it didn’t deter them from attending the prom.

#### ***In Conclusion***

This is not just a rant to allow an old man to vent (although it *does* feel good). I have a genuine concern for the future of the church. It is imperative that we teach the next generation what the words “do not be conformed to this world” (Rom. 12:2) imply. We must also impress upon them the uniqueness of the church which Christ built and the dangers of being “yoked together with unbelievers” (2 Cor. 6:14). Otherwise, we may awake someday to a church that is just another among many sectarian churches.

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