

## Viewing and interacting with other true churches and their members

Many churches and different denominations exist in the world today. These include Reformed, Baptist, Pentecostal, Roman Catholic, non-denominational, and many others. This is a massive change in the church world that started around 500 years ago. Prior to the Protestant Reformation only a few separate denominations existed, the largest of all those being the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church. The Reformation completely changed that: it created hundreds of different denominations. Sadly, many of these denominations have departed from the truth of the scripture and from the true worship of Jehovah. Many so called Christian churches in the world today worship a god that they call Jesus Christ, but is not the sovereign, holy, just, and righteous Jesus Christ that the Bible teaches. Nevertheless, true churches of Jesus Christ do exist in the world today. They may be few in number, but they do exist and these churches are not just limited to the Protestant Reformed denomination.

While other true denominations exist in the world today, some may have differences in doctrine from the PRCA. So the question that will absorb this paper is: how does someone view other true churches of Jesus Christ which may have differences in doctrine from the PRCA? How are fellow Christians called to view and interact with members of those different churches? It will be found that those of other true churches must be viewed as Christians, and so they must be treated in love and humility. Yet they must also be instructed in doctrine in a polemical fashion so that they can come to a fuller understanding of the scriptures.

Before entering into arguments for this thesis, it must be stated that this is a difficult question. It is made all the more difficult by the fact that there are so many different denominations in the world today, each with its own slightly different perspective on certain issues. This makes it hard to specifically state that there is one hard and fast way to deal with

those Christian of other denominations. Individuals dealing with this issue must deal with it on a case by case basis. That being said, there are general guidelines in dealing with each denomination and Christian, and this paper will examine these guidelines.

Let us first examine how we are called to view those true churches of Jesus Christ who may have differences in doctrine from the PRCA. Since this is a discussion of true churches (the definition of which is found in the Belgic Confession, Article 29) of Jesus Christ, then the members of those churches must be treated as brothers and sisters in Christ. It must be assumed that those differences of doctrine are slight and not of vital importance to the purity of true doctrine, the Bible, and the glory of God.

Differences in doctrine from the PRCA do not necessarily make one a heretic. In fact, there have been differences within the church, as the most basic study of church history shows. To list a few examples: Augustine held to the necessity of baptism for salvation. John Calvin believed that the remarriage of the innocent party was permissible. Martin Luther held to the doctrine of consubstantiation. These are certainly not teachings that the PRCA holds to be true, but that does not make the men confessing them any less Christian. It is certainly a weakness on the part of these men, but they must still be viewed as the elect children of God. So the Christian today must be careful in judging other Christians. In John 7:24 Christ commands the Pharisees to “Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment” (*The Holy Bible: King James Version*). That is the calling of every true Christian in the world today regarding those who may be different from the PRCA.

Let us now move on to examine how the Christian should guide his interactions with those of other true churches. A very crucial step in this is to examine the different doctrine that is

being taught. The Christian must be like the Bereans when it comes to new doctrine: they must be cautious. As Acts 17:11 states, “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” The Christian must exercise the same cautiousness with different doctrines, but also to some degree exercise an openness of mind. Not so open that they are “carried about with every wind of doctrine,” Ephesians 4:14), but nevertheless open so that they are constantly examining themselves to be sure that they are in the faith.

A most fundamental principle that should guide the Christian’s communication with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ is love. Love is vitally important here, because other Christians may have differences in doctrine from other denominations, such as the PRCA. Differences tend to bring about anger, suspicion, concern, and ostracization of the other group. Yet all these attitudes and actions ought never to exist around Christians. The Christian has been called to love his neighbour as himself and not only his neighbour, but his enemy as well. That raises the bar infinitely high. It is the hardest thing to love one who is our enemy, the one who is different from us. Humans always get along with those who they agree with, who have similar interests, likes, dislikes, and personalities. But perhaps this one specific church has a slight difference in doctrine, and thus they can be hard to get along with. The calling of the Christian then is not to hate that church, but to show love to its members.

This love will display itself in several different aspects in the Christian. The first is that it will desire to bring them to a fuller knowledge of the truth of God’s word. It will desire to show believers the correct view on topics such as divorce and remarriage, the Lord’s Supper, and baptism, in order to bring them to a greater understanding of God’s word. This evangelistic desire must always be present in the interactions with those of other denominations. It was this

desire in part that caused Peter to preach to the Jews in Acts 2 about the death and resurrection of the Messiah. This desire is also found in Paul's going into the synagogues first on his missionary journeys before preaching to the Gentiles. Paul and the other disciples desired to preach to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, so that they could know the fullness of the gospel for some of these Jews were true believers in God, but who had not yet heard about the Christ. They still needed the fuller revelation of God brought to them; one finds similar circumstances quite often in other true churches of Jesus Christ.

Another example of this desire to bring a fuller understanding of the truth of God's word is found in Paul's rebuking Peter for emphasizing the importance of circumcision. Peter was a true child of God. However, he had weaknesses and slid into false doctrine. Paul rebuked Peter for his actions, and so the Christian is also called to rebuke those true Christians for their weaknesses regarding certain doctrines.

As a brief side note here it must be mentioned that the purpose of this sharing of the truth is not necessarily to bring all these people into the PRCA. Membership in the PRCA does not equate with being included in the covenant of God: PRCA membership is not a requisite of being a child of God. The ambition and goal should be to bring them to a greater understanding of the truth. If they desire to join the PRCA after learning of that truth, that is wonderful. But if not, they should not be rejected as not being true Christians.

All that the Christian does in regard to this topic should be done in love. This will mean that ultimately the most important desire for the Christian in bringing the fuller revelation of the word of God to another Christian will be to bring greater glory, honour, and love to Jesus Christ. A greater understanding of truth will cause the name of God to be praised more fully because that person now has a greater knowledge of God. This will only happen if this is blessed by the

grace of God: only if God works in the heart of the believer will the person be caused to stop living in darkness and sin regarding some truth he has had trouble believing.

A word of caution should be included. Some people will get angry when one attempts to bring them out of their error and calls a doctrine they believe in erroneous. Some will show great hatred for that. Yet it is our calling to still love them and to dwell peaceably, as much as possible, with all men (Romans 12:18).

Also showing a fellow Christian his error in love will mean that it is done in humility. It is not done in the arrogant attitude that one has a greater understanding of the counsel and word of God. It must not be done in a haughty and prideful attitude that the one individual is more specially blessed by God than the other. It must be remembered that all saving knowledge of God is given only by the grace of God and that God out of his own grace decided to reveal that knowledge to those he did. It was not out of anything that that one person did. God could have just left that person in the absolute darkness of total depravity.

In addition, the Christian must pray. He must bring these other Christians before the Almighty, praying that they might receive the grace to be able to come to a better understanding of the truths of the word of God. God is in control of everything, even in this matter, and so the Christian must daily pray for his fellow saints. He must also pray for the grace to be able to do this heavy task. It is by no means easy to correct someone who is in error. It requires a lot of wisdom and understanding.

Finally, it must be stated that there are great dangers if the PRCA suspends all communications with those who do not agree with us on every single point of doctrine. There is the great temptation to make ourselves an island if this is done, and that leads to the mentality

that the PRCA is the only true church. That is a heresy that Rome has long held to, and it would be a great sorrow if the PRCA ever claimed that.

Therefore, in conclusion, the Christian must view other true churches of Jesus Christ in love, patience, and humility. The Christian must exercise an attitude of graciousness that is one of the great qualities of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The Christian must also try to lead other believers to a greater understanding of the truth of God. In this way he must be polemical. He must bring him the Bible, he must discuss it with him, and he must pray for the other believer. The only way that the Christian can ever show this amount of love and patience is by the grace of God. So this must be sought daily in order that the name of God can be glorified in every action. May that be the Christian's desire: that God's glory be wrought even in bringing other fellow believers to a greater understanding of Jehovah.

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