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Spiritualism and the Idea of No Particular Church

We have already seen many examples of Christian movements being formed as a reaction against a group which has veered strongly in one direction or another from biblical belief or practice. The impulse from this reaction sends the new group to the opposite extreme rather than toward a biblical practice or doctrine. One example of this which appears often in the annals of Christian history is the tendency to react against cold-hearted dogmatism or unloving and unedifying battles over practice or theology. The result is that a movement advocates a form of Christian faith which takes virtually no stand on doctrine or theology. It produces an all-heart form of Christianity. Such groups emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit in the lives of individual over the Bible as a source of truth.

## [What is the best way to study the Bible in-depth?](http://evidenceforchristianity.org/12605-2/)

## [Isn’t the Song of Songs too sexy to be inspired? How to I answer Muslim critics about this question?](http://evidenceforchristianity.org/isnt-the-song-of-songs-too-sexy-to-be-inspired-how-to-i-answer-muslim-critics-about-this-question/)

## [Can you give example in which the Old Testament tells us something is “forever” but it is replaced by something else?](http://evidenceforchristianity.org/12508-2/)

## [Why are there so many translations of the Bible and why are there so many denominations?](http://evidenceforchristianity.org/why-are-there-so-many-translations-of-the-bible-and-why-are-there-so-many-denominations/)

## [How many disciples followed Jesus at the peak of his ministry?](http://evidenceforchristianity.org/how-many-disciples-followed-jesus-at-the-peak-of-his-ministry/)

Jesus told us that his worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). These groups choose to fly with only one wing on the airplane—the spirit (or Spirit) wing. This would describe the Spiritualists. We will see in chapter seven of this volume that the Quakers chose to downplay Christian doctrine and theology for a form of Christianity based on the Spirit and the heart. Many present-day Christian groups choose to disavow nearly all questions of doctrine. This is the case with Universalists, past and present. It is the premise behind the modern Ecumenical Movement. The trend is only amplified by postmodern thinking, as postmoderns reject the idea of absolute truth.

How should we interact with believers who appear to have disavowed major areas of Christian truth? We have to admit that they have a valid point to make. Arguments over doctrines and practices have brought great discredit to Christianity. With so many contradictory interpretations, the entire Christian scene appears to be in confusion and you know what they say, “That’s just your interpretation.” What we ought to do is keep to the middle road. We should hold tenaciously to the essential truths of Christianity, but we should act with liberality to those who disagree with us on unessential matters. What church history teaches us is that this is hard to do. In volume four of this series we will learn about some who founded movements based on a commitment to the basic truths of Christianity, but who preached liberality on matters of opinion and on truths which are not essential to salvation. As the non-conformist minister Richard Baxter put it in 1656, “In things necessary, there must be unity; in things less than necessary, there must be liberty; and in all things, there must be charity.”[[1]](#footnote-2)

In the end, the Spiritualist, no matter how sincere, is wrong, at least on some essential points. Doctrine does matter. And on some matters it is not acceptable to say, “that’s just your interpretation.” Peter told us “No prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things.” (2 Peter 1:20) As a wise person once said, on questions where the Bible speaks, if there are two divergent interpretations, then there are two possibilities. Either one is wrong or both are wrong. Either Jesus is God or he is not. Either salvation is by grace alone or it is not. Either the Bible is inspired and authoritative or it is not. Our job as faithful servants is to determine what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will and to do our very best to align ourselves with that will. We can do so by obeying a command, by applying a principle or by using our experience. Commands come first, but if there is no command, we usually have a biblical principle to apply to a question, but in lieu of that, we apply the wisdom gained from experience. As ministers of reconciliation, we should take the admonishment of Paul to Timothy, “Do your best to present yourself as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15)

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With all the confusion and disagreement over important doctrinal questions we cannot simply throw up our hands and say it doesn’t matter. We cannot agree with Sebastian Franck when he said that “You should much rather interpret the Scripture as a confirmation of your conscience.” On the other hand there is much we can learn from the Spiritualists, the Quakers and even from our ecumenical and Universalist friends. We can learn from our “liberal” friends how to interact with those with whom we do not agree, to find common ground and to show grace in all circumstances.

1. Taken from John D. Woodbridge and Frank A. James III, *Church History,* Volume 2 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2013), p. 395. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)