

Building One Another A Letter of Encouragement I Thessalonians 5:11

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Dear Friend,

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The denomination that I love and seek the vitality of, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A), like many other denominations, finds itself having, as members, many people of strongly differing opinions concerning our understanding of biblical faithfulness.

I am puzzled and distressed to watch various congregations within my denomination and other denominations choose to leave their denomination because they don't like what is going on. It reminds me of the story my mother used to tell me, when I was young, of the child who didn't get to play a preferred position in a game of softball so the child "took the ball and went home," leaving everyone behind diminished.

I hear people saying they are leaving their denomination to focus more on mission or because they are tired of fighting or because they believe dearly held convictions are being assailed. Yet, God cares about our relationships even when we don't agree.

It would seem to me that if you center your theology and life on understanding and application of the teachings of scripture, that you would defend that understanding with conviction and compassion. To choose to walk away from the issue or the people you disagree with, no matter how difficult it or they may be, is to inadvertently but effectively collude with them in the ascendancy of their point of view. The alternative is to remain and work to uphold the convictions you have.

A key word in the Old Testament is "hesed," God's covenant-love. Hesed means, "I will never withdraw my love from you." When, in our view, God's people act in faithless ways, we are called to be like our God who never withholds grace while calling us to be holy. If God's faithfulness to you or me is contingent on our actual faithfulness to God, we both know we would have been abandoned long ago. Yet, we are not abandoned. Let us seek to live in a manner worthy of our Lord and in unity (Col 1:10; Jn 17:23).

With joy - E. Stanley Ott



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