

Burned by a Bad Church Experience?

I baptized a man who was at first was hesitant to discuss religion. Why? Because he was burned by a bad church experience. Eventually he was willing to look at the Gospel.

What can we do when those who claim to represent Christ have indefensibly produced evil?

First, we must admit that bad church experiences are as old as the church itself. Such problems are identified in the New Testament.

- Politicking—power seekers. Like at Philippi, where Paul wrote, *“For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell your even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things”* (Phil. 4:18-19). In another situation John wrote, *“I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind the deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church”* (3rd John 9-10).
- Exploiting others financially. Peter wrote, *“By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber”* (2nd Peter 2:3).
- Sexually Immoral. Peter wrote, *“But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption...having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices and are accursed children”* (2nd Peter 2:12-14).

We can redirect souls who have experienced such evil in churches.

- Tell them that Jesus stands against corruption—all corruption. Jesus is not corrupt, nor does he tolerate corruption. He rebuked the “religious” scribe and Pharisees, saying, *“Woes to your scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness”* (Matt. 23:27-28).
- Tell them to examine Jesus, draw near to Him and fellowship only those who walk in His light. *“Walk as children of light...and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them”* (Eph. 5:8-11).
- Be an example of Christ-likeness before them. Let them see the power of the Gospel at work in you!

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