

church of Christ at Greenwood

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Three congregations Gardner Hall

1. The traditionalist congregation focuses on maintaining long-standing practices, considering them the “safe approach.” When facing challenges, some ask, “What have our churches always done?” They take pride in their conservative identity.

The church at Ephesus might have been in this category (Revelation 2:1-7). They were very careful to avoid false doctrine (verse 3), but their service had evidently become a matter of deadening routine to the point that they lost their first love (verse 4).

2. The daring congregation prides itself on being nontraditional. It promotes new worship fads and trendy doctrines. Its members often ask, “What do up-to-date scholars say?” as if recent scholarship represented a unified dogma.

Both daring and traditional congregations can be similarly fixated on tradition — one to follow it blindly, the other to rebel against it. Both congregations highlight the excesses of the other to justify their own out-of-focus methodology. “At least we’re not ‘liberal’ like them,” declare members of the first. “We’re not pharisaical like that older congregation,” declare those of the second. However, both miss the essence of what God wants for his flocks. They overlook the fact that there is another healthy approach.

3. The Christ-focused congregation — Resembling the congregations of Smyrna (Revelation 2:8-11) and Philadelphia (3:7-13), they might appear poor but are spiritually rich (2:9). Their focus isn’t so much on trends among brethren as it is on their Savior. They may seem to only have only a little power (3:8) and are probably not widely known. However, because of their humility and perseverance in keeping God’s word, they are recognized in heaven and that’s all that matters!

Their main concern is not doing what some group of congregations or some movement has always done. Neither is it in identifying themselves as nontraditional. They simply want to imitate their Master. A part of doing that is imitating faithful early disciples who were taught by Christ’s inspired apostles and prophets (2 Thessalonians 2:14). That helps them avoid imprudence. They don’t trust in themselves to be faultless, even though that is their desire. Their aim is to grow in grace and in knowledge of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18), trusting in His mercy in those areas where growth may be lacking.

May God help us through His word and good examples to be like the third congregation. (The same principles also apply to individuals.)