

## Faith in a Vacuum?

(2 Timothy 4:3,4, NKJV) For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

Welcome to the “post-modern” era. Before you, you will find instructions that may or may not help you in case of an emergency, depending whether you believe they will or not, or you may choose to believe that they are not instructions at all, but that they are simply a nice story for children or a recipe for chocolate cake. Whatever your conclusion about them, at no time should you inform or impose your interpretation on the person next to you, even if you believe it’s important, because he/she/it may, and probably will, have a drastically different and possibly contradictory view of the situation, which is equally acceptable.

Did that make sense to you? I hope not, but this actually describes the viewpoint, in a satiric nutshell, of “post-modern” thought. Such thinking is not in itself bad. Like all tools, it has its use under certain circumstances, but those situations are rare. Quite simply, there’s a time and place for “This is what I think it means,” and there’s a time and place for “This is what it *actually* means.”

In a nation where we’re losing all sense of history except what Hollywood chooses to ration out to us, and more importantly, how to apply that history to our own lives, we find that it’s easier to rely on our own wisdom than to learn from the wisdom—and mistakes—of those who’ve faced similar situations in the past.

## How does this apply to Christians?

Post-modern thought has slowly leaked into the church, most commonly expressed by statements like, “My faith has nothing to do with anyone else,” or, “It doesn’t matter what anyone else believes, just what I believe,” or the like. While our salvation is not dependent on anyone else but Christ alone (and thus, you’re not saved just because your family has been a member of St. Paul’s for generations or because your mother still attends regularly), we have a responsibility to the community of faith in which God has placed us.

(Ephesians 2:19-22, NKJV) Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

If we are citizens of the church, then we have certain responsibilities to her, including upholding her teachings and building each other up *through* those teachings. This means that we are responsible to each other, that we need to hold each other accountable to pure teachings through word *and* action, that if someone is involved in something that could damage either his faith or the faith of someone who sees him doing it, *it’s our business* to point out the danger. The Bible calls it “speaking the truth in love.” The converse is true as well: you are accountable to others, so don’t be offended when a brother or sister seeks to help you through *constructive* criticism.

## What are the dangers of individualistic faith?

If the pieces of a house each decided they were independent of each other and could stand on

their own without the foundation, you'd quickly have a pile of rubble. The same is true of God's church. We rest first and solidly on the words of Scripture, the "foundation of the apostles and prophets." Then, with Scripture as our source, we look to the wisdom of the historic church for clarification as needed, always taking it back to Scripture to double-check, applying it to ourselves and our neighbor as needed. Such "hot topics" as "decision theology," the millennialism of the *Left Behind* books, and even Close Communion can be traced back to their historic roots in either the heresies (false teachings) of 1500+ years ago or the historic practice of the church back in the days of the apostles. Simply put, we need and are responsible *to* and *for* each other.

### What is the blessing of the "Communion of Saints"?

We don't support the church for the sake of the institution. Rather, Christ supports us through the church. "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." Acts 2:42, NKJV. The church, the assembly of believers, are centered around the Word of God preached in its purity and the sacraments rightly administered. There, you will find the forgiveness of sins freely offered through Word & Sacrament. There, you will find the building up of the body of Christ. There, you will find Jesus. Amen.