

WHAT DO YOU DO

Imagine yourself to be in the second century, in a congregation of the church. Your elders decide, for whatever reason, that they will submit themselves to an elder in a nearby town. You hear that other congregations are doing the same thing. You have been taught all your life that your local elders are the final authority on earth, and now they are giving up congregational autonomy. Since this is the only congregation in town you have no choice to move elsewhere. What can you do? A few years later the elder that took authority submits to an elder in Rome. You saw it coming, but what could you do?

Imagine yourself in the congregation in Corinth in the middle of the first century. Paul has come and gone. Your congregation is somewhat well established, but it has problems. What congregation doesn't? One of those problems is that a member that everyone knows happens to be carrying on an affair with his stepmother. Everyone knows about it, but this man is so respected that nobody is willing to say anything to him about it. (1 Cor 5) If there were another congregation in town, you would move there. But there is only the one congregation. What can you do?

Now imagine yourself in the twenty-first century, in one congregation among several in a city. Or maybe you are in a town with only the one congregation, and the nearest town is several miles away. All your life you have been, properly, taught that singing within the congregation should be *a capella*. You know Ephesians 5:19 and that it says that when you are speaking to others in the congregation in song, you are to make melody in your heart. You know Colossians 3:16 and that it says that when you teach and admonish one another in song it is with grace in your heart. You can quote all the arguments that say that the specification that you sing precludes the use of external technological assistance, just as when God specified the Jewish priests should come from the tribe of Levi that excluded all the other tribes. (Heb 8:4-5) Some in the congregation will not even listen to Christian radio because the songs have instrumental backing; others see nothing wrong with that outside of a congregational setting. Now your congregation hasn't gone so far as to bring in a piano or a guitar, but they have started "assisting" the congregational singing by using a recorded chorus. The chorus may sing *a capella*, but that is irrelevant. It is the use of an external mechanical device that is a violation of all you have been taught. The logical conclusion is that if you can use a recording, then you can use a recording that includes instrumental accompaniment. And if so, then you can use the instruments without pre-recording them. There are several factors that would make it difficult for you to move to a different congregation, and even if you did, other congregations may be doing the same thing. If you refuse to sing, are you failing to worship God? If you do sing, will others think you approve? So what do you do? What can you do?

These examples show the moral dilemma faced by many Christians throughout history. If you know a congregation is teaching or practicing error, or what you see as error, do you move somewhere else if possible, or do you stay with the congregation and try to teach the truth. And if a few years down the line you see that the congregation has slid down the slippery slope, what guilt do you bear? There is no clear-cut answer. The best you can say is that Paul never told the Corinthians to move. He never told them to stop gathering with the congregation. He told them to purge out the error among them. Perhaps that is the answer still today.