

# Are You Investigating the Truth?

Andrew Smellie | December 6, 2009

*“If you hear it said about one of the towns the Lord your God is giving you to live in that wicked men have arisen among you and have led the people of their town astray, saying, ‘Let us go and worship other gods’ (gods you have not known), then you must inquire, probe, and investigate it thoroughly. And if it is true and it has been proved that this detestable thing has been done among you, you must certainly put to the sword all who live in that town. Destroy it completely, both its people and its livestock. Gather all the plunder of the town into the middle of the public square and completely burn the town and all its plunder as a whole burnt offering to the Lord your God. It is to remain a ruin forever, never to be rebuilt.” – [Deuteronomy 13:12-16](#)*

“Investigate” – (*def-verb*): to search out and examine the particulars of in an attempt to learn the facts about something hidden, unique, or complex, esp. in an attempt to find a motive, cause, or culprit



Andrew & Patrique Smellie welcome Carlos & Lucy Mejia to Washington, DC!

In a world of misinformation and half-truths, it may be disheartening to realize that this type of dereliction can even occur in the church of God. While God’s Word is perfect, His people are not. As the Scriptures state, **“Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment.”** ([Proverbs 12:19](#)). As the old adage goes, *“There’s what people hear...there’s what people believe...and then there’s the truth.”* Confusion exists because the fiction that is told could initially sound more plausible or understandable than the truth! Ultimately, the truth will

persevere, but it may be hidden or masked by deceitful communicators, even within the religious establishment. To avoid being naïve, we must be noble enough to ***“probe, inquire and investigate”*** this truth so we can expose deceitful motives and attain accurate information. While we should all be grateful that we are not under the Old Testament standard to ***“put to the sword”*** physically because of our sin, we are called by Jesus to admonish other disciples to repent by using the ***“sword of (Jesus’) mouth”*** – the Word of God! ([Revelation 2:16](#)) When applied to a religious fellowship, if the leadership of the church does not want to repent, then we must preserve the truth by obeying Jesus’ call of pouring ***“new wine into new wineskins”*** ([Matthew 9:16-17](#)) – starting new churches to protect the lives of those who are trying to live righteously from being ***“ruined.”*** As disciples of Jesus it is our responsibility to ***“discern what is best”*** in our ***“life and doctrine,”*** so we can live a life that glorifies our Lord! ([1 Timothy 4:16](#), [Philippians 1:9-11](#))

It is interesting to notice that although Jesus communicated blatant truths to his disciples, they were too dull to understand what he meant and too afraid to ask ([Mark 9:31-32](#)). I am sure that if we were to walk with Jesus during this time we might occasionally fall into the same trap!

Unlike the other apostles, Peter had the occasional boldness and curiosity to ask tough questions of Jesus instead of giving into fear ([Matthew 15:1-20](#)). Jesus often said things that offended the religious establishment at the time, yet instead of asking why Jesus said what he did, His disciples were more concerned about how those true statements affected the religious establishment’s feelings! While Jesus may have rebuked them for their dullness, he always took the time to answer their questions with a thorough explanation. Likewise, as disciples of Jesus we must also be willing to investigate and determine the facts behind reports of error and controversy in order to ascertain the truth.

The writing of this article is due in part to discussions with the leadership of the Greater Baltimore Church of Christ (Maryland) and the Washington, DC International Christian Church – members of the former International Churches of Christ (ICOC) and International Christian Churches (ICC) respectively. On Monday, November 30th, 2009 we came together to discuss the reasons for the lack of unity between our fellowship of churches, specifically in our regional area. In attendance were Doug Lambert, Dave Brown, and Noel Garcia of the Baltimore Church, as well as Chuck Hess, Herbert Johnson, and myself from the DC Church. Special thanks to my friend Noel Garcia who asked for this meeting. I had previously met and spoken with both him and Doug on several occasions, in addition to also meeting with Dave. We began and ended our meeting with prayer on our knees, and despite our differences of opinion, I was appreciative of their willingness to speak with the respect and civility I expect from mature disciples. Sadly, this type of initiative has not been taken by any other former ICOC leader in our region. The following discusses our reasons and explanation for the present disunity from our experiences in the Washington, DC region.

## **Reason #1: The Former ICOC is NOT a United Movement**

Over the course of our conversation, Doug Lambert stated that the former ICOC was “united,” “had a central leadership,” and was “still the ICOC.” While I respect Doug’s longevity as a disciple, I believe that he is sincerely mistaken, as I was reminded of Jeremiah’s rebuke of ministry leaders in [Jeremiah 6:14](#), ***“They dress the wound of my people as though it were not***

*serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace.*" When Doug and I first met over a year and half ago, we spoke about the issues concerning how the original Washington, DC International Church of Christ had split into four former ICOC churches in our regional area since 2003: The Greater Baltimore Church of Christ, the Montgomery County Church of Christ, the DC Regional Christian Church, and the Northern Virginia Church of Christ. The original DC ICOC church that had grown to 3000 members had been reduced to approximately 1183 members, according to the information given on the Disciples Today website (as of this date), the official website of the former ICOC ([www.disciplestoday.org](http://www.disciplestoday.org)). When Doug and I first met in the summer of 2008, I related my concerns about former members of the DC Regional Christian Church. These members had called me and asked to meet, with the goal of placing membership with our new church. These disciples expressed alarm about the radical changes in life and doctrine, for the worse, that had occurred in their previous fellowship. I had challenged these disciples to go back and deal with their issues with their church leadership, but their concerns had gone unanswered and unaddressed. At that time Doug had stated that while he had spoken to the DC Regional Church leadership, he was not in a position to exert authority over evangelists in other fellowships, despite the fact that he was aware of my concerns about the DC Regional church.



Norberto Mejicanos (center), a student at Howard University, is baptized!

This lack of accountability was discouraging to hear first-hand, because the need for overseeing evangelists to enforce the correct life and doctrine in churches is evident from [1 Corinthians 4:14-17](#) & [Titus 1:5](#). Doug went on to state that when he had met with the DC Regional Christian Church leader, he was told that the leader wanted to build a “community church,” and because college campuses were not part of his “community,” he would not focus on them. Additionally, it is common knowledge that this church is heavily influenced by Rick Warren’s Saddleback Church in California, an evangelical church that believes in praying Jesus into your heart for salvation. As a disciple who was baptized in the campus ministry at Cornell University and having served as a campus minister for years, I was appalled. How could a former ICOC

church be more influenced by a false teacher than by other brothers around him? I remember asking Doug at that time, “Who is going to help him turn his church around?” I received no response.

Is this “unity?” Is this the overseeing work of a “central leadership?” Is this the “ICOC” of 1979-2002? As a young disciple I remember appreciating the standardization of life and doctrine that was present in all the ICOC churches from the time of my baptism in 2000 until the dismantling of the ICOC central leadership in 2002. I recall traveling to different churches and meeting disciples throughout the world who were “*perfectly united in mind and thought*” ([1 Corinthians 1:10](#)). What makes this lack of unity even more interesting is the fact that the DC Regional Christian Church is cited on the Disciples Today website (as of this date) as part of the former ICOC family of churches, even though it has not made any efforts to be completely united with the ICOC Co-Operation churches or other former ICOC churches in their regional area. When I asked Doug why their church was still on this official ICOC website since their self-imposed isolation from other former ICOC churches in 2003, Doug stated that it would be hard for Roger Lamb, the Editor of Disciples Today, to just “take churches off.” I find that surprising, since it seemed very easy for churches to be taken off that were associated with Kip McKean back in 2004 and in 2006 when the Sold-Out Discipling Movement started, including the church that I formerly led, the Central New York Church of Christ, now renamed the Syracuse International Christian Church. Since that meeting with Doug in the middle of last year, I have consistently brought up this lack of unity and questionable standards of the DC Regional Church. During our last meeting Doug now stated that the Baltimore leadership has since had heated discussions with the DC Regional church, and by the end of this year, the DC church will “now have to make a decision” to see if they would continue to be part of the ICOC.

In our meeting Doug also stated that in the future all the former ICOC churches who decided not to join the ICOC Cooperation Churches by not signing the Unity Proposal will not be identified with the ICOC. This is a radically different statement than the questions that were answered by Mike Taliaferro (San Antonio, Texas) in the May 30, 2008 article on the Disciples Today website entitled “*My Church Signed the Unity Proposal. What does that mean?*” The following are two questions that were raised:

Question: “Are the churches who haven’t signed on still considered part of us?”

Answer (in part): “Of course. The UPC doesn’t decide who is “with us.”

Question: “Does it draw lines between churches?”

Answer (in part): “No. While various churches decided not to participate for a variety of reasons, it does not influence our fellowship patterns...”

This obviously contradicts what was told to me by Doug, who is intimately connected to Mike Fontenot and Douglas Arthur, both of whom have been selected by ICOC delegates to their new “central leadership” that was formed earlier this year, which Mike Taliaferro is also a part of. Doug stated that the former ICOC now claims to have a central leadership consisting of 18 evangelists, with Bruce Williams of the LA International Church of Christ as their chairman.

For thousands of disciples who remain in the former ICOC, the confusion between which churches are ICOC and which churches are not has already become a stumbling block to any kind of unity even within the former ICOC.

## **REASON #2: The Former ICOC Lacks a Timely Expectation of Repentance Within its churches**

While I am thankful for Baltimore's efforts to bring unity within the DC area, why has it taken over 6 years (since 2003) for this matter to be finally addressed and only now brought to some kind of decision? Did not Jesus rebuke the church in Thyatira for their toleration of sin by allowing teachers to lead people astray? Jesus' punishment for leading others into sin is intense! In [Revelation 2:20-22](#) he states to the Thyatira Church, ***"Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways."*** Jesus' love for the church is timely and decisive. Sadly, many churches of the former ICOC are content with allowing people to repent in their own due time. As a result of reverting back to the mainline Church of Christ theology of autonomous churches, the former ICOC has no overseeing authority to influence other church leaders to repentance. If Jesus' warning was applied, stronger ICOC churches would have had the conviction to remove evangelists who were not living according to the Scriptures ([Ezekiel 34:10](#)), or at least expose the fact that their teaching is contrary to Biblical doctrine. Instead, they are giving churches "time to heal" in the name of "patience" and "grace." I find it remarkable that disciples in churches that have not repented in over six years still believe that their church leaders desire to repent. Did not Jesus state in a related parable that a lack of repentance in three or four years was grounds for a "vine" to be cut down and destroyed ([Luke 13:6-9](#))? Is Jesus not patient or graceful? The Sold-Out Discipling Movement was not fully separated from the former ICOC until October 2006, over four years after the dissolution of the Central Leadership of the ICOC at the Long Beach Unity Meeting in 2002. Has there not been ample time for repentance and restoration in the former ICOC churches? In the end, all such leaders will be judged more strictly by God and held accountable for their feeble shepherding of the flock ([Ezekiel 34:1-10](#), [James 3:1](#))





Tromila Wheat (third from left), a graduate student at Georgetown University, is baptized!

One example of godly leadership in the face of sin and compromise within a fellowship is in the book of Ezra. In Ezra chapters 7-10, Ezra the priest arrived in Jerusalem from Babylon only to be confronted with large numbers of Israelites who were intermarrying with pagans. Appalled, he cried out to God in prayer and fasted in shame ([Ezra 9:3-15, 10:6](#)). He then called all Israel to assemble and challenged them to repent ([Ezra 10:7-15](#)). Ezra required every Israelite to attend, with the proclamation that ***“Anyone who failed to appear within three days would forfeit all his property...and would himself be expelled from the assembly of exiles.”*** ([Ezra 10:8](#)). He selected family group leaders with whom he worked through to investigate the cases, and in three months they finished dealing with all the men who had married foreign women, calling out about 110 of them by name ([Ezra 10:16-17](#))! That is a biblical example of a timely and faithful leadership that honors God and calls each member of the fellowship to do the same.

While we are all our “brother’s keeper” ([Genesis 4:9](#)), I also recognize that Doug Lambert arrived in Baltimore in 2006 to help lead the former ICOC church there with Douglas Arthur. What happened between the years of 2003 to 2006? Why did Doug Lambert become the point man to help bring peace to this discord? Were there no other evangelists/elders who were present during this time of the original DC Church’s division to help restore unity, like Douglas Arthur or Mike Fontenot? What was even more disheartening was the fact that no public announcement was made to expose the DC Regional Church’s disunity, leaving hundreds of disciples thinking that everything was “normal.” Did not Paul command us to ***“Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them”*** ([Ephesians 5:11](#))?

As a fellow evangelist who has led a church in Syracuse, New York through the “Great Tribulation” following the Henry Kriete letter of 2003, I also had to deal with disciples who were hurting, weak, and deceived into compromise. Instead of making excuses, I accepted the responsibility of leadership by calling every disciple in the church to the standard of the Scriptures and to repent of their lack of forgiveness and lukewarmness. For those who wanted to repent in their weakened state, I gently restored with patience, encouragement and careful instruction ([2 Timothy 4:2](#)). For the men and women who decided to be like those in Korah’s rebellion ([Numbers 16](#)), myself and the core leadership gave the option of leaving the church, so

that their yeast of worldliness would not spread and defile many ([Hebrews 12:15](#)). As a result, a break-off group of 20 former members started the Syracuse Regional Church of Christ, which to my knowledge has had only one baptism (a “Kingdom Kid”) in over 3 years, despite support from the NYC and Boston ICOC churches. What made this experience even more challenging was the transition of faithfully sending off a mission team to Chicago with 17 members, reducing our number to only 51 battle-weary but sold-out disciples. God blessed our call to total commitment, despite our “*little strength*” ([Revelation 3:8](#)), by adding 33 baptisms, 5 restorations, and 3 placed memberships in a year and a half to snow-filled Syracuse! In addition, the Syracuse disciples sacrificed by raising over \$50,000 to support a former ICOC church in Port Elizabeth, South Africa (which we had been supporting for years under the leadership of Rod & Linda Fick) as well as to raise another \$50,000 in missions and provide mission team members to join my wife and I as we moved to plant a new church in Washington, DC! I find it ironic that while we were being called “divisive” for our association with the McKean and the Sold-Out Movement, we were supporting a former ICOC church that was surrounded by other former ICOC churches (which numbered in the thousands) who did nothing financially to support it, yet they claimed to be part of a united “movement.”

My “case-study” experience in the DC area has shown that autonomous fellowships cannot influence each other in a timely fashion. Unfortunately, former ICOC churches that do practice the correct standard of life and doctrine are associated and aligned with those that do not. As a result, there is “unity” in disobedience. Like Solomon dealt with Abiathar by removing him from leadership ([1 Kings 2:26-27](#)) for his support of Adonijah’s rebellion towards David ([1 Kings 1:7](#)), there must also be judgment for those who support others in wickedness especially if they lead churches that are allowing their members to be led astray.

### **REASON #3: The Former ICOC Does Not Want to Be United With the ICC**

In the meeting with the Baltimore leadership, I asked the question, “Do you believe Kip McKean should remain disfellowshipped by the former ICOC?” Doug Lambert answered, “I’ll answer your question with a question: ‘Is Kip willing to shut down his movement and unite with the ICOC?’” He went on to state that the new ICC movement was “wrong” but that he was still willing to “work with us.” My problem with that answer to my question was obvious: The Sold-Out movement is a movement of God, not a movement of man. When cooperation becomes more of an issue of personality than conviction, there will never be unity ([1 Corinthians 1:11-12](#)). In our movement of churches, and specifically within my church, we have never hindered anyone from attending any of our meetings in order to worship our Father in “*spirit and truth*” ([John 4:23-24](#)). Noel & Janice Garcia of the Greater Baltimore Church of Christ and a campus student from Howard University of the Montgomery County Church of Christ can attest to that fact. The same cannot be said for the former ICOC churches in our surrounding area with the exception of the Baltimore church. I have not witnessed a cohesive desire for “*complete unity*” ([John 17:23](#)) between us and the former ICOC churches in our surrounding area. As of the date of our meeting with the Baltimore leaders, neither the DC Regional Christian Church nor the Northern Virginia Church of Christ in our area have signed the Unity Proposal or joined the ICOC Co-Operation churches ([www.icocco-op.org](http://www.icocco-op.org)). This also does not include churches like Toronto, Rhode Island, San Francisco, and hundreds of others in the former ICOC fellowship of churches. The total number of former ICOC member churches that the Disciples Today website

claims is 545 ([www.missionmemo.org/stats/totalmembership.html](http://www.missionmemo.org/stats/totalmembership.html)). The amount of ICOC Co-Operation churches is presently around 350 ([www.icocco-op.org/content/view/77/63/](http://www.icocco-op.org/content/view/77/63/)). Even within the Co-Operation churches, I have heard first-hand reports of radical differences in regards to life and doctrine.



Kristine Lyons (front & center) is baptized!

As mentioned above, the former ICOC churches in our metropolitan area have had radically different responses to our presence in DC. While Doug Lambert from the Baltimore Church took the initiative to call and meet with me, none of the others did. In all fairness, I did not expect them to. In the former ICOC's eyes, we are apparently a divisive "movement of Satan" as was previously stated by an evangelist in the LA International Church of Christ. Sadly, we have become *"your enemy by telling you the truth."* ([Galatians 4:16](#)) As I shared my faith at the University of Maryland and discovered that the person I was sharing with was the Ministry Intern for the Montgomery County Church of Christ, they soon decided not to fellowship with us, even after speaking with one of their ministers. The same situation happened at Howard University, when I shared my faith with a student whom I later discovered attended the DC Regional Christian Church. When I attempted to meet with him to discuss our unity, he told me that after speaking with his leadership, he was told not to meet. While I've spoken several times with the DC Regional Church's campus minister, there has been no further interaction between our churches. Due to the lack of a campus ministry at George Mason University earlier this year, Noel Garcia asked us to start a ministry there in order to support his wife who was a student. We willingly traveled over 45 minutes from DC just to help her study the Bible with friends. Once we did, we discovered that the Northern Virginia Church had finally decided to hire a ministry couple for that campus. I have spoken to the new campus minister there, but there has been no attempt at unity between our churches. While I thank God that our time here in DC has inspired



other churches to action, how can we be united with a fellowship that does not really want to be united with us?



Jason Reali is baptized!

The time has come for faithful leadership to advance God’s kingdom by following His standard of righteousness ([1 Samuel 2:35](#)). The time for *“beautiful love songs”* from the pulpit that does not expect disciples to obey and put God’s word into practice is over ([Ezekiel 33:30-33](#)). If your church leadership claims *“peace, when there is no peace”* and covers the flimsy wall of lukewarmness with *“whitewash,”* then as a disciple of Jesus you must choose *“what is best”* ([Philippians 1:9-11](#)) and leave ([Ezekiel 13:10](#); [2 Chronicles 11:13-17](#)). Internal rebellion is forbidden ([Romans 13:1-2](#)), so please do not incite others to revolt. Remember that God himself *“will tear down the wall you have covered with whitewash and will level it to the ground so that its foundation will be laid bare. When it falls, you will be destroyed with it; and you will know that I am the Lord.”* ([Ezekiel 13:14](#)) It is time to have the urgency to *“inquire, probe and investigate”* any report of sin in our fellowship the way that Phinehas son of Eleazar did with the tribes of Israel in [Joshua 22](#). The goal of our convictions is to achieve the vision of Jesus – the evangelization of the nations in our generation! This vision makes discipling a necessity, overseeing evangelists a necessity, central leadership with authority a necessity, unity and cooperation between churches a necessity, and the sharing of resources – disciples and money – a necessity to achieve the dream of our Savior and Lord! As Jesus stated in [Matthew 24:14,34](#), *“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”* *“I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.”* Decide to join our efforts to testify to the grace of our Lord in our generation! And to God be all the glory!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Smellie', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Andrew Smellie

Evangelist