

Note: The following account was originally found at the website [Discerning the Church of Wells](http://www.thechurchofwells.org/speaking-interview-ex-cow-members/), at the following link: <http://www.thechurchofwells.org/speaking-interview-ex-cow-members/> It appears that the post has since been taken down.

SPEAKING OUT! AN INTERVIEW WITH EX COW MEMBERS

We are sitting with several ex-members of the cult known as the Church of Wells who have kindly agreed to respond to some questions regarding their experiences.

We know that to make known the activities of this group comes with a cost. In some cases the act of speaking out prohibits them from seeing members of their family who remain in the cult. Mothers lose contact with children, and grandchildren of they are caught sharing anything regarding the secret dealings of this illusively dangerous cult. Others lose access to people that they care about: best friends, and people who they have bonded with while in the cult dynamic. It is not a small thing for someone to speak out publicly and takes a great deal of courage and conviction.

Therefore we have been asked to withhold the identities of these witnesses for their safety and to comply with their personal wishes*. Which we have honored in order to protect any relationships that exist between these people and those still trapped behind the wall of confusion and error surrounding this controversial and dangerous group.

DCoW: What can you tell us about the kinds of things people might expect to experience when first looking to join the CoW?

Ex-CoW: Well it depends on whether the CoW leadership think they are saved or not. When they are considered unsaved they are barred from the church gathering until the elders confirm that they are saved.

Of course they will have a place to stay but will preached to for hours on end. They will have food and boarding but will probably be called “unclean” or “lost” and not be allowed to openly communicate with others until they are deemed “clean” or “saved” by the elders.

DCoW: How will the Elders determine their salvation? What types of situations will they expect you to engage in as a “right of passage”?

Ex-CoW: You have to be completely broken and open to listen to their preaching, willing to forsake all. The CoW call this “getting lost” – you must be lost before you can be saved.

DCoW: What did you and others in the cult have to do to be accounted as “lost”?

Ex-CoW: I know some of us were expected to stay in a small room or even a shed at the bottom of the yard – I know one person who as there for several weeks at a time. Some people only spent one day in this type of situation before they were considered “broken” or “lost” and “saved”. It depends on the person and what there outward signs are before the elders. You are not allowed to appear happy, you have to be visibly mournful in the elders eyes, taking everything with absolute seriousness and sobriety.

DCoW: What sort of room do people stay in? Was it large or small, and what type of amenities did they have?

Ex-CoW: The house smelt awful and there was a special room which smelt the most! In the special room there was just mattresses on the floor and they looked really overly used and many years old. I mean I’m not sure if they realized how bad the house smelt or he room also, but it was disgusting. At this time there was also really hot weather. I stayed just one day in this room and then went to the shed for the best part of two weeks – there was a normal bed though which was better. The idea of these locations was a place to seek God and grieve your sins.

DCoW: Are people in this type of situation allowed to leave the room or speak to people?

Ex-CoW: Yes, you can leave, but you are not to speak to anyone and the others are not allowed to talk to you because you are “outside the camp”, and considered “unclean” or “leaven”. They say “you should not eat with your brother because a little leaven, leavens the whole lump”.

DCoW: How are you reckoned as saved?

Ex-CoW: It is different according to each case. You have to have a state of brokenness and an internal “miracle” of some kind is expected! A mighty change of heart, personality, or a revealing of the scriptures must be indicated. There must be a willingness to give up everything. All passions, desires, and whatever it is that you find

precious to your soul. Family, job, money, views, music, arts, your own wisdom, whatever. This is called repentance!

You are then immediately baptized. Baptism is normally very near to this salvation experience.

If someone is independent he must commit to the them instead. Any indication that you are not following the expected way, you will be called unclean again. If you are not serious enough of show signs of sobriety then you are unclean. If you do not obey them, you are unclean. If you do not do what they tell you to do – you are unclean.

(There is an obvious nervous agreement but also reticence among the group to say anything direct or conclusive when speaking against the elders. In our experience talking to survivors of the cult there remains a fear that God will strike them down for talking against the elders. It is a huge thing that these survivors had come to a place corporately to speak out against the cult – but the fear battle still rages within. Perhaps strength in numbers and growing confidence in seeing others who shared the same experiences has given courage.)

DCoW: Who do you mean “them”?

Ex-CoW: To the Elders!

Any independence would be expected to be discarded. Total dependence is expected.

DCoW: Dependence upon who, the elders?

Ex-CoW: Yes!

DCoW: ... the church and their teaching?

Ex-CoW: Yes!

DCoW: What kind of dependence, please describe?

Ex-CoW: In the long term you are expected to quit anything that is not considered advantageous to group or your personal holiness.

Hebrews 11:25 “Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season”

If you want to stay “clean” you cannot listen to other preachers on the internet, attend other churches, or read commentaries – all these the elders consider unclean or lukewarm. It is hypocritical that they quote men of whom they say that you cannot listen to or visit.

DCoW: Like who?

Ex-CoW: Ravi Zacharias is guilty of worldly wisdom. John Piper is the same. “It is grieving” they say. Francis Chan is considered a cult leader.

DCoW: What about Paul Washer?

Ex-CoW: He has been considered back-slidden and danger of going to hell. The elders go back and forth, but they do not like the fact that he does not approve of the CoW. He is “redeemed” but backslidden, and would go to hell if he died today – yet they continue to post his sermons online and glean people from Facebook pages relating to Paul Washer.

DCoW: How does the behavior towards you change when you are “clean” or saved?

Ex-CoW: They call you only by your first name when you are unclean, but you are called “brother” when you are considered “saved”. There are levels of informational freedom depending on if you are saved or not. You are also allowed to attend the services.

DCoW: Do you remain clean or can you lose your cleanliness?

Ex-CoW: You can become unclean if you are rebellious, stubborn, not loving your brethren – not walking in the light.

Walking in the light means sharing openly even the deepest things of your heart. You must answer any questions that you are asked about concerning personal matters etc.

DCoW: What is considered “rebellious”, what does it look like?

Ex-CoW: If you do not want to do what you are asked, whatever it is – you are considered rebellious.

DCoW: What are you allowed to do and not allowed to do?

Ex-CoW: AAAAA!!!!

DCoW: Lets change the subject, can you tell me about the teaching on pain they we talked about earlier before the interview.

Ex-CoW: They say because Jesus suffered without uttering a word:

Isaiah 53:7 – “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.”

We are expected to bear pain, even when pain is excruciating – because it is stated that Jesus suffered without opening his mouth. Therefore we should not complain or shy away from pain and suffering of the flesh. Medicine is considered “worldly wisdom”, so rarely do they seek any medical assistance. Cuts, broken bones, dental pain, child birth are all considered something that should be accepted without a word or grumbling. The CoW are against pain killers which is considered witchcraft, because they influence the brain. Sometimes I think the elders would allow their wives to suffer more pain as an example to the other brethren. A kind of spiritual competitiveness, it is unsaid but it is clearly going on and expected.

DCoW: Will they ever seek medical attention if someone is sick and in danger?

Ex-CoW: Not as a first priority! They would see medical attention when they have a “yes” from God to do it, but first they have to proof through much prayer through the men, and I believe mostly through the elders. What they will attempt to discern is what God is saying through the situation and if the person has to learn something through the suffering, and how long they should wait until they take medical advise. So it can be days in suffering when they believe that they should not get help from a doctor or medical advise.

DCoW: Lets talk about the character of the elders. Do you think we have been unfair in our articles concerning the elders character?

For example the fact that the elders were “young converts” we they began, or regarding the lack of fruit concerning love for the brethren. Not in the way that people often teach “God is love” but in balance with the other virtues of a true Christian.

Ex-CoW: No, you have not been unfair.

DCoW: Would you say that the elders exhibit the fruits of the Spirit as found in Galatians 5?

Ex-CoW: No, I think they are outwardly acting in ways that could look “holy” or “spiritual” but when you look at their fruits they do not match the fruits of the Spirit. Especially in regards to patience, love, kindness, self-control, peace.

I do not see love in the family unit in the elders – Ryan is not loving to his daughter, he speaks words like “I love you” but I have never seen him hug his daughter or show any affection. You can hear the terrible things they say to their children on audio on the internet. They will spank their kids for swinging their feet just a little bit, or moving in the service. It is horrific! Children are spanked not loved. I also see a competitive spirit regarding child training and the growth expectance of their children. Even the young children are expected to be “saved” as soon as possible so that they can authenticate the elder’s ministry. If the children do not become “saved” then the elders will have to step down from ministry, so there is soooo much pressure on those tiny children to perform. It’s disgusting!

They are not charitable to outsiders, praying for their destruction, death, sickness upon their household. They use fear and guilt to control people. Whenever someone dies that has rejected or opposed the cult, or is just someone they do not like – they claim it as the judgement of God, and see it as vindication of their ministry and calling.

They should have a “good report of them which are without”, but they do not.

DCoW: How do they use guilt?

Ex-CoW: They make you feel bad for not obeying, or agreeing with them. To disagree with them or not obey them is to disobey God. They teach that you are not obeying Jesus “In them”. Which makes their authority equal to God if you think about it. You cannot obey God and disobey/disagree with the elders! This is above the given authority that you find in the bible.

DCoW: Do you feel that the leadership have a good understanding of the gospel?

Ex-CoW: No.

DCoW: Why?

Ex-CoW: Romans 4 says that grace is for them that worketh not – it is ridiculous to think or add anything to your salvation – you cannot! There is a misunderstand the gospel – because the CoW add to this that you must keep adding to righteousness through works. This will be denied by CoW but is true in practice. So many things are not what they appear on the surface. If you do not “moan” as evidence of carrying a “burden” then you are said to lack seriousness. If you are too light or happy then you are not sober enough. If you do not pray and grieve then you are not full of the spirit. If you do not obey the elders you are guilty of lacking “charity”.

If over time you are not continually burdened for the remnant you will be called unclean, because you do not have “love” for the lost and the brethren. The degree is measured and judged by them, not your own heart before God.

So you must always show that you are burdened, and grieved about the darkness of the world around you. There is a standard that must be met – although it is not stated this way it is expected. If you are not acting in accordance to this subjective standard then you are no longer right with God.

DcW: Wow, that sounds exhausting and probably by the sound of it there is very little room for victory in Christ and true joy.

Ex-CoW: Yes! The feeling of condemnation and the weight of expectation is mostly heavy. There are some people there who are so lovely and we enjoyed their fellowship, until the elders or the preachers would come and put burdens on you again – preaching to you for several hours at a time without warning. Yes, you would see the preachers coming and think – oh no, we are going to get trapped – which is not charity. If you do not listen it is not charity. If you speak up – it is not charity!

DcW: Could you just say – “thanks but I am tired” and pull away? ... Did this preaching ever happen at inopportune times – say late at night? Did they consider the fact that you have to get up early etc.

Ex-CoW: Yes, you could say something, but you would not because you would be rebuked and it would be really bad. It mostly happened in the evening and go on until the night. Sometimes they would go on to the early hours of the morning. The longest was six or seven hours of continuous preaching.

DcW: What was so important that they could not wait until Sunday?

Ex-CoW: They go about from house to house “putting our fires” – dealing with subjects relating to confronting anything that threatened the unity of the group. Preaching would be about why we should not have fellowship with certain people (outsiders). Why they are backslidden. Why we are blind, and not understanding God properly because we hardened our hearts against the church or the teaching.

DcW: What about leaving the group?

Ex-CoW: When you try to leave the group you have no charity or love for the brethren, and that you forsake Christ in them and so forsake God.

DcoW: Do you ever feel that you would be killed by God for disagreeing with the elders? Do they teach this?

Ex-CoW: Yes!

DcoW: Why do you think the CoW use fear and condemnation?

Ex-CoW: Because they imagine God is always angry or severe, and He does not tolerate any sin. They do not see the love of God but only the judgement of God. Perhaps because of how the Old Testament speaks of Israel being a stiff necked people – this is what they transfer to the New Testament. The church is judged in light of what bad things God said about Israel. In fact everything is really judged and taught through an OT lens. The focus on prophets, clean and unclean, outside the camp, Joshua generation etc.

DcoW: What would you say to someone who is thinking to visit the CoW?

Ex-CoW: Why do you want to go? What makes you want to go to Wells. If you are searching for authentic Christians – I would say that is a good thing in itself, but I would not go to Wells. Although they appear serious and pious on the outside and on the internet, they are not the answer. Jesus is not found in any particular church, especially not in CoW. There is hypocrisy and double standards – one for the elders and their favorites, and another for others.

Many people who have been Christians for a very long time and have a good character, older in the faith who have given many warnings about them. There is much unnecessary controversy and trouble caused by them and it is not good.

Since being among true believers I marvel at how gentle, kind and loving they are. It has driven me to tears because of the contrast between true brethren and the experience we had at Wells,

There is such a lack of love, and so much pressure upon the brethren at Wells which causes such grief and sadness which is totally unnecessary.

To experience a different form of Christianity has been healing. Jesus said you will know that they are my disciples because they have love for one another.

DcoW: I know it has been difficult and has taken you time to recover from your experiences at wells, and I am so thankful to all of you for sharing with us. I hope many will heed the warnings, and benefit from the insights you have provided.

May the Lord continue to show you his ever increasing love and kindness, and His all sufficient grace found in Jesus Christ.

* To make their identities known it would cause stress upon relationships and close doors for possible interaction with current members who are still trapped in the cult.