
Words of Truth

Institutionalism – The Lines Are Not Clearly Drawn

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The institutional mindset exists in nearly every church of Christ that exists today to one degree or another. While all of those congregations may not be in favor of using the Lord's money to support human institutions to do the Lord's work, they still have their ties to some sort of human institution that is unscripturally doing the Lord's work. Amongst those claiming to be "Non-Institutional" churches of Christ, you find many who tie themselves to Florida College, One Stone Biblical Resources, the Guardian of Truth Foundation, and other affiliated institutions. These things are often subtle. While some churches of Christ clearly show their support of orphan homes, schools, etc.; others are a bit more secretive about these things. We should not be surprised at such for error is often subtle (II Corinthians 11:3).

An example of the subtle ties between these human organizations and many churches of Christ, is the human organization called "Congregate" (<http://www.congregateonline.com>). It is a software company that was started by Florida College alums under a company called DP Media Group (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/erockwallace>). The "who's" "who" of congregations that love Florida College (<http://www.congregateonline.com/gallery/>) use this software that provides membership tracking, member interaction tracking, website hosting, contribution tracking, etc. (<http://www.congregateonline.com/features/management/>). Since Florida College is the "Non-Institutional churches of Christ" Vatican, it should not be a surprise that an organization exists that ties the college to congregations in these ways.

Florida College alums, people that proclaim to be "Non-Institutional", have also formed at least one human institution for adoptions (<https://www.sacredselections.org/directors/>). In addition to this, other Florida College alums have formed at least one human institution such as "1213 online" (<http://1213online.org>), which is a human institution that provides benevolent care to Christians in need. Yet, those same people say James 1:27 is an individual command.

This is a small sample that proves that the lines between those practicing Institutionalism and those proclaiming not to are not clear. The only thing all of these people in error really disagree about is who can fund these human institutions. They do not, at all, have any disagreement about the existence of these human organizations. As we have already covered, God has authorized three institutions to do His work on earth. The family [home] is an institution God put in place (Ephesians 5:22-6:4). The government is an institution God put in place (Romans 13:1-7). The church of Christ is an institution God put in place (Matthew 16:13-18 and Hebrews 3:1-6). If a work is of God, to be done by an organized group of people, it must be done through one of the organizations He authorized to do so. The blurry lines that exist today make these errors hard to recognize amongst those proclaiming to be churches of Christ.

With Blurry Lines, You Must Pay Attention To Small Details

Many so-called churches of Christ that believe and practice Institutionalism are obvious. These are not as concerning to those of us who know the truth for we can see them from afar. However, the congregations that oppose church supported Institutionalism, but have no problem with the formation of unauthorized human institutions doing spiritual work are of greater concern. The word of God warns us about wolves in sheep's clothing (Matthew 7:15-20). They are not easily seen. In fact, the faithful have had them creep in and they were unaware of such (Jude 1:3-4). At times, the wolves can already be among the saints and waiting to arise for their unlawful causes (Acts 20:28-31).

Knowing them by their fruits requires an attention to details. For example, when a congregation has members who are encouraging the youth to attend Florida College Camps, they are planting the seed of Institutionalism. When members of congregations are pushing the purchase of "Bible Materials" from a certain bookstore written by certain people, they are planting the seed of Institutionalism. When members of congregations are encouraging subscriptions to certain "brotherhood publications", they are pushing Institutionalism. When a congregation is using "Congregate" software, they are supporting Institutionalism. When a congregation has a certain group of preachers holding "Gospel Meetings" and those men are associated with schools, publishing companies, etc.; they are pushing Institutionalism. Pay attention to what the members and leaders of congregations are doing. Look behind the curtain and see the details.

Don't Let Those Operating In Disguise Go Unnoticed

We cannot ignore the fact that false doctrines and practices are often stealth operations. We cannot sit back and allow those operating in secret to get away with their errors. Consider how Paul, Barnabas, and Titus dealt with such: *"Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also. And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain. But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised: And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you"* (Galatians 2:1-5). If you care about the souls of your brethren and yourself, you will mark and avoid those whom are tied to Institutionalism (Romans 16:17-18).

Conclusion

This article will conclude our series on Institutionalism. While there are side issues that are often tied to this subject, this study should resolve all of the main questions that an honest Bible student would have regarding Institutionalism. Remember, as with all false doctrines, to be careful not to fall prey to these errors. For, if you do, you will stand accountable for such on the Judgment Day (Matthew 15:1-14, II Corinthians 5:10, Ephesians 5:6, and II John 1:6-11).