

Words of Truth

Exposing Denominationalism Among “Churches Of Christ”

By: Brian A. Yeager

It certainly is not joyous to sit and write this article. In fact, it is out of much affliction and anguish of my heart that I am writing this article (cf. II Corinthians 2:4). The apostasy among our so-called “brethren” today causes great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart (Romans 9:1-3). Though it is not “fun” to have to write this article, consistency demands such be done. As I wrote the previous fifty-one articles in this series exposing denominationalism, nearly every point that was made could be applied to many so-called “churches of Christ”. It is hypocritical to point out the errors of others without pointing out those same errors among “us” (Matthew 7:1-5).

False doctrine among churches of Christ is not a new problem. As you read the letter written to the church of Christ in Rome you see division between Jew and Gentile Christians, misunderstanding of the law of Moses being put aside, and other errors. Among many other errors, denominationalism existed within the church of Christ in Corinth (I Corinthians 1:10-13; 3:1-6). The churches of Christ in the area of Galatia had followed man-made doctrines because of crafty false teachers (Galatians 1:6-12; 3:1; 5:7-9). The church of Christ in Thyatira had become complacent in allowing false teachers to dwell among them (Revelation 2:14-16). The church of Christ in Antioch was allowing parts of the Old Law to be bound without God’s authority (Acts 15:1-35). The Apostle Paul had to warn the elders in Ephesus against false teachers coming from the outside and rising up from within the flock (Acts 20:28-31). Error is not a new problem among the Lord’s people.

It is always easy to point out the errors of the denominations. Yet, it is not the denominational world that poses the greatest threat among saints. We must be more concerned about the wolves in sheep’s clothing (Matthew 7:15-20 and II Corinthians 11:12-15). Thus, we must be willing to point out errors among “us” (Ephesians 5:11, I Timothy 1:3-4, I Timothy 1:19-20, I Timothy 6:20-21, II Timothy 1:13-15, II Timothy 2:14-18, III John 9-11, etc.).

This article certainly will be hard to read. It could even become discouraging as we read how far from the truth some have gone. Before we begin doing that, let’s be mindful that God’s people usually are smaller in number than what it appears (Genesis 6-8, Matthew 22:14, Luke 13:23-24, and I Peter 3:20-21). We can take courage however, in knowing that there is always a remnant (Romans 11:1-5). The Sunrise Acres congregation here in El Paso is most certainly part of that remnant, but there are others too. In fact, there are certainly others we do not even know about. So, take courage in knowing God’s people are not gone. Right now, the remnant is simply regrouping.

Like many of our time now, in the past I was naïve enough to think that the right name on a sign “the church [body] of Christ” (Romans 16:16, I Corinthians 12:27, Ephesians 1:22-23, etc.) meant that God’s people were meeting in that building. However, the Scriptures show that the right designation

does not mean the right actions are being accomplished (Jeremiah 7:10-11 and Jeremiah 7:30). When you think about it, if you take away the right name on the sign, there are things going on among “churches of Christ” that would make you think these people are Baptists, Methodists, and even Catholics.

If You Removed The “church of Christ” From The Sign, What Would You See?

If you read this quote, what comes to mind: “Jesus emptied himself, gave up every attribute and power he possessed as a member of the Godhead equal with God, and took on as he lived in this world the God given attributes and powers of all men (Philippians 2:5-12). He lived and died on this earth as a man...” (<http://www.cochhftw.org/RALPHBEALL.html>)? If I had read this quote, having never been told that so-called “brethren” deny that Christ is deity, I would have answered that this is a Jehovah’s Witness who wrote that. Yet, this quote comes from the “church of Christ” in Fort Worth, TX. Sadly, many so-called “churches of Christ” hold this false view about our Lord. It’s a false view because Jesus is, was, and always will be God (John 1:1-5, John 1:14, John 8:56-58, Romans 9:5, I Timothy 3:16, Titus 2:13, Hebrews 1:8-9, and I John 5:20). You cannot be a Christian and deny that Jesus is, was, and always will be God (John 8:23-24)! Now, if you did not know that this quote above came from a group bearing the right name, wouldn’t you think it was a statement made from a denominational church?

When you read the following quote, what comes to mind? Notice: “PHOEBE was a servant, ‘deaconess,’ in the church at Cenchreae. Though we do not have a detailed account of the work done by her, she was by Paul commended to the Church at Rome as a faithful sister and ‘deaconess,’ who had helped him and others. Those who love the Lord are anxious to see his cause prosper, and function in every righteous way. The student of the New Testament often inquires: ‘In the days of the apostles there were women in the church called ‘deaconesses,’ why is it that we do not have such women in the church today?’ This question is then followed by another, namely: ‘What were the qualifications of the deaconess; and what were her duties?’... Paul was telling of the qualifications of the deacons, a selected group of men who serve in the church, and in the midst of the discussion he turned aside to make reference to the female-deacon, or deaconess, and her qualifications. There were such women in the church in the days of Paul., women who were servants of the church... The sister who prepares the Lord’s table each Sunday is serving the congregation — she is a servant, a deaconess in the church... It should be known in every congregation that Sister Phoebe, Sister Priscilla, and Sister Dorcas are deaconesses in the congregation, and that when their assistance is needed they are to be called. Many congregations are falling short of the work that should be done, because they do not have women appointed to do certain work for the church. You know of some work that should be done, but you are not financially able to do it, and it is passed by; but if you knew Sister Phoebe was a servant of the church and was in position to see the work done by the church, you would call her and accompany her on the mission of mercy. Humanity would be blessed, and the church fill a place of service. The church must carry on; and to properly function under divine directions there must be elders and deacons doing the work assigned them; and **as there was need for the deaconess in the early days of the church, so there is now**” (C.R. Nichol, “*God’s Woman*”, pages 159; 161; 164; 165, Nichol Publishing Co., 1938).

C.R. Nichol is dead! However, men such as Royce Bell of the Mountain View church of Christ in San Bernardino, CA are continuing his doctrine. Notice: “Traditionally, 1 Timothy 3:11 has been interpreted as qualifications for the wives of deacons. This is very curious in light of the lack of qualifications for elder’s wives. A preferable interpretation recognizes the natural divisions of the section on deacons, noting that in the first century at least some women were serving in specific tasks for local congregations

(see Romans 16:1). C. R. Nichol (God's Woman, published 1938) was a vocal proponent of this position; **believe he was correct**" (<http://www.faithlight.org/id39.html>). When I read these quotes I think of the Lutheran Church and others who hold this view (<http://www.thelda.org/>). I am amazed that any moron could conclude there is an office of a deaconess in the church of our Lord. A deacon is to be the husband of one wife (I Timothy 3:12). The wife of a deacon is to be grave, not a slanderer, etc. (I Timothy 3:11). That does not make the wife of a deacon a deaconess any more than being a child of a deacon gives you a role in the local church!

When you read this, what comes to mind: "For your convenience this page allows you to register online prior to the start of the VBS. Attendees that have not registered online should be at the church building at 6:30 PM on Wednesday July 27. If you have registered online and received an email confirmation then you can show up at 6:45 PM on July 27. The VBS is scheduled to run from 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM each night. Adults will meet in the auditorium. Children's classes will be divided based on age. In addition to Bible studies and lesson related activities for the kids there will be puppet shows to help the younger kids understand the lessons" (<http://www.thenortheastchurchofchrist.com/signup.htm>)? When I read about VBS, puppet shows, etc. I think of Community Churches. However, the quote above is from the website of the North East church of Christ in High Springs, FL. It is the word of God that converts people to Christ (Psalms 19:7, Romans 1:16, Romans 6:17, I Corinthians 1:17-21, I Corinthians 15:1-2, Colossians 1:5-6, I Thessalonians 2:13, and James 1:21-25). The Lord's body should not be involved in providing social entertainment for anyone (Romans 14:17). The church of Christ is the pillar and ground of the truth (I Timothy 3:15), not the stage for puppet shows!

If you read a website that stated: "Jesus Throws The Best Parties" advertising summer small group studies, what would you think of? If you searched that same website more and found this, what comes to mind: "Weekend Both/And Assemblies - Saturday (Instrumental Worship): 5:00 p.m.(CST), Sunday (A cappella Worship): 9:00 a.m.(CST), Sunday (Instrumental Worship): 11:30 a.m.(CST)"? Folks, you guessed it. It sounds like any denominational church, but it is the Richland Hills church of Christ in Richland Hills, TX (<http://www.rhchurch.org/pages/assembly-times/>). Amazingly, they even have their own store where they sell products (<http://store.rhchurch.org/>). This group ignores that Christ wants us to sing in worship rather than play mechanical instruments of music (Matthew 26:30, Mark 14:26, Acts 16:25, Romans 15:9, I Corinthians 14:15, Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16, Hebrews 2:12, and James 5:13). They, like many others, have opted to add to the inspired instructions of the New Testament, which in itself is sinful (Proverbs 30:5-6, Jeremiah 7:30-31, Matthew 28:18-20, Luke 4:4, and II John 9).

We could continue much further illustrating the point above. Yet, you should be able to see that many meeting in buildings displaying the right name are more like denominations than the church of our Lord. Instead of holding to the pattern of the New Testament (II Timothy 1:13), these groups are saying they're one thing (the church of Christ), while truly being another (Denominational). This all gets worse when you look at more errors of our so-called "brethren". Quickly, we can see that many "churches of Christ" today are more influenced by the denominational world than by the word of God.

They Learned These Things From The Denominational World

There is a website that has a list of so-called "Church of Christ Affiliated Colleges and Universities" (http://www.plymouth-church.com/colleges_universities.html). There are some missing from this list, but on this page is Abilene Christian University, Austin Graduate School of Theology, Florida College,

Australian College Of Ministries, Bear Valley Bible Institute of Denver, Brown Trail School of Preaching, Faulkner University, Harding University, Lipscomb University, Lubbock Christian, MSOP, and many others. Guess how many “Church of Christ Affiliated Colleges and Universities” we read about in the New Testament? **NONE!** That’s right, not even one! The inspired word of our Lord tells us of every good work (II Timothy 3:16-17). If having colleges, preaching schools, etc. were of the Lord we’d read about them in His word! Our “brethren” did not learn to form these schools from the Bible; they learned it from the denominations. Having these schools are just as grievous as is any addition to the word of God (i.e. mechanical instrumental music in worship to God, fornication during the partaking of the Lord’s Supper, etc.)! If it is wrong to add to God’s word on one issue, and it is (Numbers 9:1-8, Deuteronomy 12:32, and Revelation 22:18-19), it is also wrong to do it on any other matter (Luke 6:46 and James 2:10).

There are churches of Christ practicing “Baby Dedication Services” (Del City Church of Christ; <http://vimeo.com/1869153>), “Sanctuary Dedication Services” (Clear Lake Church of Christ; <http://www.clearlakechurch.com/renovation>), “Building Dedication Services” (Vilonia church of Christ; <http://www.viloniachurch.com/>), and on the list could go. We should be assembling to worship God (John 4:23-24, Acts 20:7, and I Corinthians 11:18-34). One cannot dedicate their child to the service of God under the New Testament of Jesus Christ. Each person is expected to hear, believe, and obey the Gospel of Christ after counting the cost and deciding to serve God on their own (Acts 3:19, Acts 18:8, Luke 14:25-33). We should not be inventing services to dedicate things, which God hath not asked for (Colossians 3:17). The remaining ignorance of the activities above should be clear! These so-called “churches of Christ” learned these things from denominational churches rather than God’s word!

While the New Testament of Jesus Christ clearly shows the submissiveness a woman is to have to man, there are “churches of Christ” ignoring this too (Titus 2:3-5 and I Peter 3:1-7). Candice Cox is an evangelist and the contact person for the “church of Christ” in Roswell, NM (<http://www.churchofchrist-roswellnm.net/>). If you want a Bible Study, the website of the church there tells you to contact her. The West Islip Church of Christ has a leadership council governing the local church. This council is made up of both men and women. They also have women deacons (which we’ve discussed briefly already). Along with Don and Hubert, Sue and Donna are on this council (<http://wichurch.org/blog/index.php/leaders/>). I suppose they are ignorant to the fact that women, in and outside of the assembly “everywhere”, are commanded not to teach over a man or usurp authority over a man (I Timothy 2:8-15). Besides that, there is not an authorized “counsel” for the Lord’s body. These so-called “churches of Christ” did not learn these things from God’s word. They learned these things from the denominational world.

The influence of the denominational world is clear in the quotes above. Many have left denominations just to “join” “churches of Christ”. Clearly, they’ve kept some of their beliefs and have spread those among the ignorant in the pews. Aside from that, so-called “Christians” have become students more and more of commentaries written by men rather than the Scriptures that were given by God (I Corinthians 2:9-13). This influence is seen in the errors taught and practiced that scream “CALVINISM” among many so-called “churches of Christ”.

The Commentaries Have Taught “Us” Calvinism (cf. I Corinthians 4:6)

What comes to mind when you read this: “The Holy Spirit speaks to unbelievers about their standing before God”? That statement came right from the “Irresistible Grace” false doctrine out of John Calvin’s commentaries (<http://www.e-providence.org/fivepoints.htm>). However, the quote I gave was

not of Calvin, but a member of the “church of Christ”. The quote above came from the Uniontown Church of Christ, which assembles in Cherry Tree, PA (http://www.uniontowncoc.com/For_Your_Reading.php). That same article went on to teach Perseverance of the Saints saying: “Not only are we in Christ, but **we have been ‘sealed’ there permanently at the moment of salvation. We have become children of God, and what He has done cannot be undone.** The Spirit is God’s pledge that we now belong to Him, and that someday we will live with Him eternally” (http://www.uniontowncoc.com/For_Your_Reading.php). For one, the Holy Spirit does not speak to anyone to convert him or her to Christ (Mark 16:15-16, John 6:63-64, Acts 2:37-41, Acts 8:25-39, and Romans 10:14). Secondly, the Holy Spirit does not keep anyone faithful, that is our job (John 8:30-32, Acts 14:22, Romans 2:7, Colossians 1:23, and Revelation 2:10). Christians certainly can fall away (Luke 8:13, I Corinthians 9:24-27, I Corinthians 10:12, I Timothy 4:1, etc.). The church in Cherry Tree, PA has fallen prey to Calvinism through their ignorant teachers (cf. I Timothy 1:7).

Peter McPherson admits that he learned his teaching from Albert Barnes Commentary when he emailed an article in February 2009 saying: “I basically lean to the following comments of Albert Barnes As to the best and the possible meaning of Jesus’ words recorded in Matthew 27:46 and taken from Psalms 22:1. After presenting references to the awful physical and mental punishments inflicted upon Jesus Barnes says: ‘and yet we have reason to think that there was still something more than all this that produced this exclamation. Had there been no deeper and more awful sufferings, it would be difficult to see why Jesus should have shrunk from these sorrows and used such a remarkable expression. Isaiah tells us Isa_53:4-5 that ‘he bore our griefs and carried our sorrows; that he was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities; that the chastisement of our peace was laid upon him; that by his stripes we are healed.’ He hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us Gal_3:13; he was made a sin-offering 2Co_5:21; he died in our place, on our account, (I prefer the wording “on our behalf, pmc) that he might bring us near to God. It was this, doubtless, which caused his intense sufferings. It was the manifestation of God’s hatred of sin, in some way which he has not explained, that he experienced in that dread hour. It was suffering endured by Him that was due to us, and suffering by which, and by which alone, we can be saved from eternal death.” Folks, Peter McPherson works with the church of Christ in Canada (<http://www.peterboroughbibleproclaimer.ca/>). He is teaching what is known as the substitution doctrine. Contrary to the views of Calvinism, Christ is not our substitution as the ram was for Isaac (Genesis 22:10-13). Jesus is the SACRIFICE (Ephesians 5:2 and Hebrews 10:10-12), not a substitution. No single human being could have ever done what Jesus did (Hebrews 9:8-14; 23-28); therefore He did not die in anyone’s place! It was HIS work to do (Matthew 20:28).

Calvinism isn’t the only thing being learned by denominational commentaries. The very concept of commentaries, selling books, etc. has really influenced churches of Christ. If you are a “Conservative Liberal” you should have the Gospel Advocate Commentaries as your creed book. If you are a “Non-Institutional” member of the church of Christ you should have the Florida College Lecture Books, Homer Hailey’s Commentaries, or the Truth Commentaries at least. On and on we could go, but think about this for a moment. Can so-called “brethren” condemn denominations for having creed books while “we” have libraries full of them? That is pure hypocrisy (Romans 2:1-3).

Speaking of libraries brings another point about. The Forest Hills Church of Christ in Memphis, TN spent millions of dollars constructing the N.B. Hardeman Library for their school of preaching (<http://www.msop.org/images/library2.jpg>). This is merely idolatry, which we ought to flee from (I Corinthians 10:14). Why are these “brethren” spending so much time and money to revere a man? Hint, their doctrines come from MEN (Mark 7:7-9)!

Many More Doctrines Of Men

Where did our “brethren” learn to be racist? Islam is divided by race (i.e. black Muslims). Baptists and other denominations have racial boundaries separating their people. So-called “churches of Christ” have divided up into Black churches, White churches, Hispanic churches, Korean churches, and others. “Brethren” have even formed a “Black” college (<http://www.wordsoftruth.net/wotvol9/wotbulletin04192009.html>). Those who have done these things have copied the denominational world. Racial division among God’s people is simply SINFUL (Acts 17:24-30 and Galatians 3:26-29).

Catholics have a “pope”! “We” do too. Of course, it depends on what sect of “churches of Christ” you are in. It may be Guy N. Woods, Garland Elkins, Robert Taylor Jr., etc. types if you are “Institutional”, but partially conservative. If you are “mainline” you’ll hear what comes out of Harding or Freed Hardeman University much like Catholics look to the Vatican. If you are “Non-Institutional”, but of the unity in diversity/Romans 14 group you’ll hear what Buddy Payne, Ed Harrell, Bob Owen, and their crew says. If you’re Non-Institutional, but of the artificial covering error, you’ll look to the Diestelkamp brothers for your beliefs to be justified. Sadly, I could fill up this page and not touch even half of the sects among our “brethren” who have their own pope’s and organizations they look to for authority. The Scriptures condemn exalting men (Matthew 23:5-12 and Acts 14:8-18). These “brethren” need to learn to look to the Scriptures, instead of blindly trusting in the false doctrines of men (I Corinthians 4:6, Colossians 2:8; 18-23, I Thessalonians 5:21, and II Peter 1:3).

We have many churches of Christ that believe it is wrong to use multiple containers to partake of the fruit of the vine (http://churchofchristonecup.org/about_us.html), though our Lord plainly authorized such (Luke 22:16-20). We have churches of Christ that teach women to wear artificial veils upon their heads (<http://lavistachurchofchrist.org/LVanswers/2003/2003-10-01.htm>). These groups are ignoring that a woman’s hair is her covering (I Corinthians 11:14-15). Unity in diversity has come in among “us” from denominations (<http://www.wordsoftruth.net/PDFGivinganAnswerUnityinDiversityAnswers.pdf>). The Westside church of Christ here in El Paso is so open to “visitors” that they admit being a flawed group of people open to all (<http://www.westsidecoc.com/who.htm>). This “church” has ignored the commands for the individual and the collective to be flawless (Matthew 5:48, II Corinthians 7:1, Ephesians 5:27, I Peter 1:13-16, and II Peter 3:10-14). There are still **many** more errors (Lord’s Supper, marriage, divorce, remarriage, lack of discipline, worldliness, and on) we could discuss, which is saddening (cf. Psalms 14:3).

Conclusion

Throughout this article I talked about “we” and “us”. I am not implying fellowship with any of those “churches of Christ” that we discussed in this article (Ephesians 5:11 and I Timothy 5:22). My aim is simple though, we have a lot of housework to do in trying to reclaim the fallen (Galatians 6:1-2 and James 5:19-20) and marking those who will not be restored (Romans 16:17-18). “We” cannot always just talk about the errors of denominations without acknowledging and dealing with those same errors among those who call themselves our brethren. This would be hypocrisy (Matthew 7:1-5).

The answer is not to drop the name “church of Christ” as the denomination “A church of Christ” here in El Paso has done. The answer is that we mount up and warn the wicked to repent and warn the ignorant to avoid these and the many other denominational errors among “churches of Christ” (Ezekiel 33:7-16 and Acts 20:26-27)!