
Words of Truth

"I Consider Myself A Member Of A _____ Church Of Christ"

By: Brian A. Yeager

Back in September I received an email from a man wherein, amongst many foolish things, he made the statement that motivated the writing of this article. That statement was this: "I consider myself a member of a non-institutional Church of Christ". I get that sometimes we try to find ways to identify what errors we oppose and where we stand, but to create subdivisions of the Lord's body is going too far.

Consider some things about statements such as the one I have mentioned above. For one, if there is a "Non-Institutional church of Christ", doesn't that necessarily imply that there is an "Institutional church of Christ"? How many churches of Christ are there then? Are there "Instrumental" and "Non-Instrumental" churches of Christ? Are there "Pro-Abortion" and "Anti-Abortion" churches of Christ? Where does this end? Where are these terms in the Scriptures?

The same is true with the idea of being a subtitled Christian. There are no such things as "Denominational Christians" or "Non-Denominational Christians". That would necessarily imply that people practicing denominationalism are Christians. What we are going to find in the Scriptures is that there are Christians who are simply Christians. We are also going to find that there is the church of Christ without any subheadings.

Christians Are Christians And The Church Is Just The Church

We find the term "Christians" once in the Bible (Acts 11:26). We find the term "Christian" twice in the Bible (Acts 26:28 and I Peter 4:16). When you read Acts 11:26 you found that Christians are simply disciples of the Lord. Disciples of the Lord are those who have come to know the truth and continue in that truth (John 8:31-32). There were no subtitles for disciples.

The Scriptures identify the Lord's church as "the churches of Christ" (Romans 16:16), "the church of God" (Acts 20:28, I Corinthians 10:32, I Corinthians 11:22, I Corinthians 15:9, etc.), "the church of the living God" (I Timothy 3:15), and "church of the firstborn" (Hebrews 12:23). All of these terms point to the church of Christ. Christ is God (Matthew 1:23, John 8:56-58, John 10:30-33, John 20:28-31, Acts 20:28, Romans 9:1-5, Colossians 2:8-9, Titus 2:13, Hebrews 1:8-12, I John 3:16, and I John 5:20). Christ is the firstborn from the dead (Colossians 1:12-18).

The only words added to those terms in the Scriptures are terms that identified location. For example there was the church at Jerusalem (Acts 8:1), the church at Cenchrea (Romans 16:1), the church at Corinth (I Corinthians 1:2), the churches of Galatia (Galatians 1:2), the churches of Judea (Galatians 1:22), etc. Similarly, we tell people we are the Sunrise Acres church of Christ.

The phrase “of the saints” is used to describe the assembly of Christians (I Corinthians 14:33). That is the only other description I am aware of in the Scriptures. One thing I am sure of, there is nothing about being “Non-Institutional” or “Institutional” churches of Christ. There are no Scriptures that say there are “Instrumental” or “Non-Instrumental” churches of Christ. The church of Christ is just that – the church of Christ.

The Bible teaches us that the church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23). The church is the one body of our Lord (Romans 12:4-5, I Corinthians 12:12, Ephesians 2:16, Ephesians 4:1-6, and Colossians 3:15). Christ is not divided (I Corinthians 1:10-13). When man forms “different brands” (for lack of better terms) of the church of Christ, those “different brands” are new bodies. That folks, is the core and root of denominationalism. You are either with Christ or not (Matthew 12:30). There are no subdivisions in the body of Christ.

Again, I get that we look for ways to be clear in stating where we stand. I too have thought long and hard about how to identify myself as not practicing the errors of Institutionalism since I had been in those errors in the past. One can say I am a member of the church of Christ therefore I oppose the errors of Institutionalism or any other false doctrine. That does not mean that you can start adding to Scriptural terms that identify the Lord’s people. When you examine any single congregation claiming to be the church of Christ, you will have to look at what is believed and practiced among those people to know if they’re brethren. Terms won’t tell you very much, if anything at all.

You Shall Know Them By Their Fruits, Not A Subtitle (So To Speak)

Terminology does not identify people. Someone can call himself or herself anything, but that does not make them what they call themselves (II Corinthians 11:12-15). The Scriptures teach us to test people to find out who they really are (I John 4:1-6). Here is what the Bible says about how to identify wolves amongst sheep: *“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them”* (Matthew 7:15-20).

Conclusion

We cannot form new denominations just because we want to identify ourselves as being separate from some false practices amongst so-called “churches of Christ”. One error prevalent amongst churches of Christ in the first century was circumcision as a statement of one’s faithfulness to God (Acts 15:1). That false doctrine had to be dealt with anywhere that it arose (Galatians 6:12-15). What you did not find was brethren relabeling the church of our Lord as the “Non-Circumcision church of Christ”. Brethren, if this is how we should deal with false doctrines the Lord would have shown us such in His word. Remember, every good work is revealed in His inspired word (II Timothy 3:16-17). Therefore, let us not have this form of denominationalism in the Lord’s body.