

The Old Paths

Volume 14, Issue 25

August 19, 2007

“Are We Becoming Denominational?”

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Brethren down through the years have continually made the point that the Lord’s church is not a denomination. When we speak of the church found in the Bible, the church of Christ, we are not speaking about a “branch” off a “mother Church” somewhere. The church the Lord founded (Matt. 16:18) is composed of Christians, living and dead, who have inhabited (and are inhabiting) every continent on this earth (Acts 2:47, 1:8, etc.).

The Bible teaches that there is such a thing as a local body of believers. These people, gathered in one locality, are united to work and worship the Lord, spreading the gospel where they live. Such descriptions of local congregations are found in the Bible. Remember the churches in Corinth, Ephesus, Thessalonica, Colossae, etc.? In any of these cities one would find Christians gathering “into one place” (I Cor. 11:20) to worship the Lord (Jn. 4:24). The influence of the Christians was felt not only locally, but also regionally, and world-wide when they worked to spread the Lord’s word (I Thess. 1:8). Sometimes, the churches sent men from their number to go and preach to the lost (Acts 11:21-24, 13:1-5). They also supported men already preaching in “foreign lands” (Phil. 4:15-16). They were working to accomplish the Lord’s purpose (Lk. 19:10). Their interest in lost souls was evident.

Sadly, this emphasis and drive was lost in the generations following. In years past, when people

grew weary of the Lord’s plan for the church, they devised their own plan. They began to devise works and organizations which resulted in local congregations losing their autonomy. Soon, hierarchy and political structure took over, causing local congregations to be subject to larger congregations, “regional” elders, and similar things. This work continued to grow until one was crowned the head of the church on earth in 606 AD. By this time, the Lord’s plan for the church had been abandoned, and the organizational structure so prominent in the world then, bore no resemblance to what the Lord described. (cf. Phil. 1:1)

Afterward, various men and movements continued to fight the Catholic monstrosity (called Protestants, for they “protested” what was happening), but all they accomplished was creating smaller versions of what they protested. This is because their plea was to simply “fix” what they didn’t like about the Catholic church. Some time later, a cry was made to “restore” the Lord’s way, demanding that men simply follow the Bible; abandon their creeds, long-standing “traditions,” and family loyalty, and simply serve God. No doubt, many people had made this plea through the years, but now such a plea was heeded, and from the cry and call of such preaching, we have Christians today, and congregations of God’s people all over the globe!

Unfortunately, we are alive to see people who are again not satisfied to simply follow the Lord’s plan for His church. Some today wish to “turn back the clock” and act like the denominational world at large. Some

have done this ignorantly, and some have done this purposely, but the fact remains that it has happened. Friends, could it be possible that I am one who has refused to learn the Bible, and to learn from history, and have been fooled into following something that is not of God? Could this have happened in your life, dear friend? I am afraid that some have been fooled, and are walking a dangerous path away from God and into denominationalism. How so? Please consider the following....

Denominational Attitudes

It is evident that some today harbor denominational attitudes. It is seen in the terms used and in the practices that have been suggested and/or tried. This attitude takes one away from God and His will, and leads one to a selfish attitude in which one justifies actions because “I” like it, “I” think it glorifies God, or “I” don’t see anything wrong with it, etc. Such an attitude completely ignores the statement of Solomon who said: “*There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death*” (Prov. 14:12). This attitude ignores the apostle Peter’s words. He said, “*If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God...*” (I Pet. 4:11). Such an attitude snubs Paul’s inspired command. He wrote, “*And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him*” (Col. 3:17). Does this mean nothing to us? Let us check our attitude and make sure that we submit to God’s will in all things and not deviate from it!

Denominational Terms

The attitude described above manifests itself in various ways. One way we observe the denominational attitude in folks is in their speech. Like Peter, their speech “betrays” them (Matt. 27:73)! Sadly, many brethren use denominational terms when speaking. It is true that some things are said out of ignorance, but some are said because people are thinking in a way reminiscent of the denominational world.

“Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.” (Jer. 6:16)

If you don't believe this, consider the following paragraph, and see if you have heard such terms used.

I remember meeting an older fellow one summer day. As we were talking, he said, **"I am a Church of Christ."** A what? I have sometimes heard the term **"Church-of-Christers"** used by people who ought to have known better. In fact, I have been called a **"Church of Christ preacher"** on occasion. Folks, such terms are as wrong as they can be! Other more "moderate" terms are used when someone says, **"I am with the churches of Christ."** Some speak of **"my church"** and **"your church."** Some look at a place made of bricks, mortar, wood, plastic, and metal, and say, **"This is the church."** Some ask, **"Are you church of Christ?"** When asked where some people worship, I have heard folks say, **"He is church of Christ"** or **"I am church of Christ."** Such phrases are used by those who have picked up the jargon of the denominational world.

Why discuss this? It is because those examples above are misuses of the description "church of Christ." To speak of a "church of Christ" is to speak of a group of called-out people (Christians) who are serving God. One person is not a "church of Christ." One person is a Christian! (I Pet. 4:16). Did Agrippa tell Paul: *"Almost thou persuadest me to be a church of Christ"* (Read Acts 26:28)? Luke recorded that *"the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch"* (Acts 11:26) — not the disciples were called "church of Christ's," "churches of Christ," or "church of Christers" first at Antioch!

Furthermore, when one joins himself to a local body (Acts 9:26-28), he is part of that one local work, and that is all. In other words, a Christian is not with "churches of Christ." He is a member of _____ church of Christ in his town. To say one is

"with churches of Christ" implies a corporate structure that simply is not authorized of God. Each local body is autonomous, and independent of all others on earth. If this is not the case with the church of which you are a member, then you're practicing something not found in the Bible.

We hear certain men being called "church of Christ preachers." Often in this is the statement that he preaches "church of Christ doctrine." I have been asked on more than one occasion what "my doctrine" is. I have no doctrine of my own. I just teach what the Lord has said (I Pet. 4:11; Jn. 12:48). Furthermore, I am not a "church of Christ preacher". I am a preacher of the gospel of Christ (I Tim. 2:7; II Tim. 2:11). And woe unto me when I stop preaching the gospel of Christ, and start preaching "church of Christ doctrine" (I Cor. 9:16)! Woe to anyone who would listen to and accept such from the pulpit, in a Bible class, or anywhere else.

It is my unfortunate experience to know some men who have said with confidence, "We ARE a denomination!" With such attitudes as this, is there any wonder why Satan has such a hold on people today? (I Pet. 5:8) Sadly, he has deceived many brethren, too (Jn. 8:44).

Denominational Practices

Yes, we see denominational practices being carried out among some of God's people. Below is a short list of practices that are quite prevalent.

1) Once Saved, Always Saved: No,

we may not teach it (Gal. 5:4), but it is practiced by many churches when we refuse to carry out corrective discipline like we should (II Thess. 3:6; I Cor. 5)! Failing to discipline leaves the impression that folks are accepted of God in their sinful condition, and this is wrong.

2) Baptism Isn't Necessary For Salvation: Yes, we have some brethren wondering whether or not baptism is actually essential for anything! They, like the denominations, are contradicting Christ (see: Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38; I Pet. 3:21).

3) Worship With Mechanical Instruments: Were you aware that some groups with "church of Christ" on their sign use mechanical instruments? It is true. There are more popping up all the time. Many of our own "sound" brethren have forgotten God's word, for they "see nothing wrong with it," either (see: Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).

4) Fellowship With Denominations: Some wish to ignore differences, and "unite" with denominations under the banner that says, "we are serving the same God." In light of the doctrine and works of the denominations, how can this be true (Matt. 7:16, 20, 15:8-9)? God asked, *"Can two walk together, except they be agreed?"* (Amos 3:3). We need to reread Ephesians 5:11 and II Corinthians 6:14-17!!

Conclusion

Many other things could be added to this list. Brethren, let us take a good hard look at ourselves (II Cor. 13:5), and determine not to follow in the footsteps of men, but follow the Lord (I Pet. 2:21-22).

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