

Churches of Christ – Then and Now

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Introduction: We need to clearly know the difference between the work of God and the work of men.

- A. The work of God may appear to fail but we would be mistaken. **(Mt 28:18-20)**
 - 1. Those who yield their hearts to the authority of God and call others to do so will be found in His body, “the church of Christ.” **(Eph 1:22-23)**
 - 2. Anyone acquainted with Bible history or church history knows that God’s people have historically failed to instill faith in their children. **(Judges 2:7, 10-12)**
 - 3. There is one question we must answer: Are we really following the Lord?
- B. We are going to examine the essence of a Biblical faith. What does it mean to trust in God?
 - 1. The people of God often turned from God to things that cannot save! **(Mt 3:9-10)**
 - 2. The people of Jeremiah’s day were to learn a horrible lesson. **(Jer 7:4, 8-11)**
 - 3. Many have done this with the name “churches of Christ.” What really is the “church of Christ?”

I. How I became a member of the church of Christ

- A. Love for my Lord demanded that I surrender things that divide. **(Jn 17:20-23)**
 - 1. I was raised in a religious body that had good sincere people in it.
 - 2. Why does division exist? What can I possibly do as a single individual?
- B. One of my first challenges came as I examined the Lord’s Supper. **(Mt 26:26-28)**
 - 1. In the Baptist church I never remember partaking of it.
 - 2. Driving home from Samford University I heard a radio sermon on the subject. The early church met on the first day of the week! **(Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:1-2)**
 - 3. I tried to imperfectly practice what I had learned.
- C. While attending the University of Alabama I heard a basic presentation on how Jesus directed men to be saved. **(Mk 16:15-16)**
 - 1. It was important not to base your conclusion on just one verse. What did Peter preach? **(Acts 2:38)**
 - 2. As I examined all the verses on this subject, I found that whenever baptism and salvation (forgiveness of sins) are mentioned together that baptism always is placed before salvation. **(1 Pt 3:20-21)**
 - 3. After studying and asking further questions I decided to be baptized into Christ and take a stand to be just a Christian. **(Acts 19:1-4)**
 - 4. Was I right in doing that? The church I identified with in 1973 would take a completely different view 25 years later. Other churches have too.

II. There has been a shift in attitudes towards the Bible

- A. Are we willing to believe all good works are found in the scriptures? **(2 Tim 3:16-17)** - “thoroughly equipped for every good work”.

- B. In the 50's and 60's these things were universally preached by brethren. However I believe there were serious inconsistencies in their application.
- C. Which view supports the Bible as complete? (**Col 3:17**)
1. "The Bible is our guide only as it specifically commands or prohibits things. **Where the Bible is silent we are free to act**, with the only limit being our conscience."
 2. "The Bible is a complete and sufficient guide. **We must have Bible authority, i.e. Book, Chapter and Verse, for all that we do.**"
- D. A new generation began to express doubts in the 50's and 60's
1. "**Where there is no pattern we have freedom to act.**"
 2. "**I would rather be doing something than nothing.**"
 3. "**We will achieve greater results as long as brethren will go along.**"
 4. "**Carnal incentives are necessary to attract people so we can teach them. Times dictate that we must use these new things to reach others.**"
- E. Arguments made today
1. **We live in a rapidly changing culture.**
 2. **The makeup of the church has changed.**
 - a. The "baby-boomer" generation needs a different kind of worship than the "world war two generation".
 - b. "Because of video games and television we must have more than the Bible to keep our young people."
 3. **There are serious problems in how the church is doing its work.**
 - a. The "Church of Christ" has stopped growing and will become extinct.
 - b. The "Church of Christ" has fallen into a "blind traditionalism". We have become like the Pharisees.
 4. What is common of ALL of these arguments? Their Bible is closed! (**Gal 1:10**)

III. There is a shift in attitudes towards the work and worship of the church

- A. One of the first steps away from the scriptures in the 50's and 60's was the refusal to apply the principles of Bible authority to the work of the church.
1. If the subject of worship was discussed, then Bible authority was emphasized. This was especially true of instrumental music.
 2. Church sponsored recreation has become the norm in these churches.
 3. This inconsistency would be clearly seen by those who apply Bible authority to the question of recreation.
 4. What has been the result? The Bible has been ignored so "unity" can prevail.
- B. How has the Lord equipped the church? (**Eph 4:11-12**)
1. What is the work of "apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers"?
 2. The church is a spiritual institution with a spiritual work.
 3. Jesus knew that only the power of God's word could change men and build them up! (**Jn 6:44-45, 26-27**)
 4. When you view carnal incentives as a work of the church there will and a downward spiral that will end with a worldly church. (**Acts 20:32; 1 Tim 4:1-4**)
- C. In the 60's compromises in worship it began with youth in "Rallies" and "Retreats"

1. In these audiences it was less likely that the young people would object.
 2. “Youth Ministers” thought something special was needed to “keep” the young.
 3. Many things would go on out of sight of the majority of older members.
 4. Brethren decided to use “what works” to add excitement to worship.
- B. Today what began among the young has now entered into the whole congregation.
1. The “Pep Rally” atmosphere has come to the assembly.
 2. Choirs are now being used (There are called singing groups). Some churches are putting hidden microphones on the best singers! What does God hear?
 3. Hand clapping is taught with the singing.
 4. Sermons and other events are commonly applauded.
 5. Many churches are merging with churches within the Christian church denomination and are now using instrumental music in their worship.
 6. The push to have women lead in the worship is now taking place.

IV. The church that introduced me to the gospel – then and now

- A. I came to realize that the call to be undenominational was not taken seriously.
1. After leaving the Baptist church I tried to apply what I learned to resolving differences among brethren! **(2 Tim 3:16-17)**
 2. I tried to take all the verses on a given subject and stay within whatever that teaches. **(Col 3:17, 2 Jn 9)**
 3. I was shocked to find that brethren were fearful of such a study. Many became angry because I simply asked to study over an open Bible.
 4. The most difficult decision I ever made spiritually was to leave that church.
- B. 25 years later I was shocked to hear that the University church in had invited Tony Campolo to be a keynote speaker in their “Youth in Action” program.
1. I was stunned to hear the preachers there were making the very arguments that I had heard from the Baptist church.
 2. Even today members from the Baptist church are welcomed into their membership with no challenges to their baptism.
 3. I asked in 1996 “Should I have left the Baptist church?” to an Abilene Christian University discussion list. NO ONE thought that I should have and many ridiculed me for doing so.
- C. Are we not far behind?
1. In recent months I have known several to have left faithful churches and become a part of the University church and others like it.
 2. I have witnessed the arguments and attitudes of some as they openly participate in on-line discussion groups and post in their blogs.

V. How can we continue to practice simple New Testament Christianity?

- A. We must let our focus be upon God and not upon the writings of men!
(Ex. Preachers luncheon, internet outlines)
1. There is nothing wrong in asking for and insisting upon “the truth.”
 2. Some may be like Pilate and deny any such possibility. **(Jn 18:38)**
 3. Are we like Pilate or like Jesus? “Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice” **(Jn 18:37)**

B. It is not “legalism” or “traditionalism” to pursue a principled life based upon definitive answers found in the word of God.

1. New Testament Christians would have been startled that anyone would ever question the need to seek the truth about all things God revealed.
2. Consider how the Apostle John described Christians in **2 John**.
 - a. “all those who have known the truth” **(1:1)**
 - b. “the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever” **(1:2)**
 - c. “I rejoiced greatly that I have found *some* of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father” **(1:4)**
3. John plainly wrote that we need to know if “we are of the truth.” **(1 Jn 3:19)**

C. We must not be afraid of open challenges and controversy.

1. When leaving liberalism I attempted to get others to open the Bible and discuss differences, nearly everyone refused and often with anger.
2. People who do not fight for the truth will not have it over time. **(Jn 3:19-21)**

D. Are we hearing these basic truths from our pulpits?

1. Here is a recent e-mail from a brother:

I sorted through my collection of papers and found your series on “Institutionalism--Then and Now An Overview”, which you preached at the Lacey’s Spring congregation several years ago. I did this after hearing some sermons this past week. My questions are as follows:

- 1.) How do bad personal experiences influence a preacher to make steps toward a wider fellowship?
- 2.) What book would someone have read if they really thought the true practice of the 1st century Lord’s Supper was a common meal that was shared during the service?
- 3.) Should someone think a false teacher is only a person who has insincere motives in their teaching?
- 4.) Should we think that non-instrumental music in worship is a logical and natural conclusion from the N.T.?

2. When was the last time you hear a lesson on instrumental music?

E. It is not enough to verbally oppose these things. We must take a stand and that will involve fellowship!

Conclusion: Who do I really want to have fellowship with?

A. While some say they want to be right with God, they in fact want to please men. **(Gal 1:10)**

1. While we may fool men, God knows our heart!
2. I have talked with men about what was right and what they needed to do. Even though they have agreed with me, I have often heard the refusal to stand rationalized like this: “It is hard to do what is right!”

B. What will heaven be like?

1. It will be filled with men of faith who at times had to stand alone. **(Heb 11:32-38)**
2. Have you heard of these men? Sethur? Gaddiel? Palti? Shaphat? Nahbi?
3. How about these men? Caleb? Joshua?