

Denominationalizing The Church #2

The undenominational character of the church revealed in New Testament scriptures is easily apparent to unprejudiced minds. The simplicity of it is evident. The government of God's people can be set forth in a few simple sentences.

The church is the spiritual body of Christ and He is its head (Ephesians 1:22-23). The same passage affirms that Christ is the "*head over all things to the church.*" This simply means that He is the exclusive head -- the only head -- and that there is nothing which is any part of the church over which He is not head. The church is a realm where the authority and rule of Christ is absolute and complete. This eliminates Catholicism because the Catholic church claims two heads -- Christ and the Pope. That is one too many.

The scriptures also reveal that there are not many bodies but "*one*" (Ephesians 4:4). It is just as scriptural and right to teach that there are many Christs as to teach that there are many bodies. Yet this is the essence of Protestant denominationalism. The entire denominational conception is that there are many bodies and one is just as good as another. This idea is as much a monstrosity as the two-headed body of Catholics.

Many brethren (or at least they were) today have the denominational concept of the church in their idea that the "churches of Christ" compose "The Church of Christ." This is being heard on every hand. E. R. Harper of the Herald of Truth has preached all over this country that the church is the army and the local churches of Christ compose the various battalions of that army. Carl Spain in an hour-long recorded speech argued that there is an "organic" connection or relationship between all the churches of Christ on earth. That there is a spiritual connection in the relationship every Christian sustains to Christ would be undeniable but the idea of an "organic" connection tying all of the churches of Christ together is rank error and evident sectarianism. There is a film strip, with a record accompanying, put out by some of the brethren (the voice on the record is not identified) advocating that the church is the body -- in a universal sense and that the members of the body (i.e., the hand) represent the congregations. The recorder goes on to say that of course there are various members of the hand representing the individual members of the congregation. This is the attempted defense they make of the amalgamation and federation of congregations into the "cooperative" or sponsoring organizations that characterize the promoting liberal churches of today.

In one instance on a sign identifying the church as "The Church of Christ" there was a further point of identification: "The church with a complete scriptural program." By this they meant simply that they were having a part in all or at least all kinds of federated programs promoted among the churches of today. They make this a point of identity. In the publication fathered by Batsell Barrett Baxter and M. Norvel Young, "Churches Of Today," their questionnaire seeks to establish their identity as a separate body by asking the churches to signify whether or not they believe in and support the institutional orphan homes (so-called) among us and the federated promotions in evangelism such as the Herald of Truth. These "Churches Of Christ Of Today" (reminding one of the "Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints," and one of these days they will identify themselves by some such distinctive title) have denominationalized themselves by this concept of the churches a universal body composed of smaller units (local churches) tied into the "mainstream." The church is the vine and the congregations are the branches according to them. This is very little different to the concept that denominational preachers have contended for through the years, i.e., Christ is the vine and the denominations are the branches. One is just as scriptural as the other. John 15 teaches, of course, that individuals are the branches not organizations.

Where in the Bible does anybody learn that the "*churches of Christ*" (Romans 16:16) compose the "church of Christ?" Such teaching is not in the Bible and one who does not know the teaching of the word of God better than that is incapable of teaching the truth to anyone.

Bible teaching sets forth each congregation or community of Christians in their own geographical locality as the church of Christ in the absolute and complete sense, and if there were but one on earth instead of a plurality or multiplicity of congregations, it would still be the church of Christ in the exact sense in which the Bible uses that term. The church in a universal sense has no organic existence but is a common relationship that all the saved individuals on earth sustain to God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

Some brethren in their ignorance are contending that one church of Christ can withdraw fellowship from another church of Christ. How can this be unless there are organic ties in some sense? You cannot sever what is not joined! The concept of universal federation and one church withdrawing from another grows out of the same error. One church might refuse to recognize another as a church of Christ, but this is as far as that can go scripturally. Brethren who are trying to stand for the truth against present day institutionalism need to see that they surrender their very ground when they con-

tend for the right of one church to discipline another or disfellowship another.

The undenominational character of any church of Christ can easily be lost. Churches of Christ are undenominational in the fact that they have no denominational name, creed, and organization. Whenever any church made up of God's people adopts human doctrines, human designations, or form human combinations and organizations, they have already denominationalized themselves and lost their identity as "*churches of Christ*" in reality.

The pattern of apostasy has always followed the same course. The devil infiltrated the Jewish nation with a corrupted idea of government. God was their King! But Satan planted in their minds the desire for another king, an earthly or human king, that they might be like the nations of the world. When they made this demand, although God let them have their way, they had actually rejected God as their king and corrupted their government. This led to their eventual ruin as a nation.

Moreover, when the church had been planted on this earth, and in Paul's day the spirit of iniquity was already at work, the first thing Satan sought to do was to corrupt the organization of the church. Inter-congregationalties soon corrupted the equality, independence, and autonomy of the churches and gradually human doctrines and human methods of worship led them into complete apostasy. The devil knows that if he can get control of the organization of God's people, he can have his way in all other regards.

In the great apostasy of the churches of Christ of the 19th century that formed the Christian Churches and their denomination, the procedure, once again, was exactly the same. Satan corrupted the simplicity that is Christ by introducing the missionary society among the churches. Wherever it was accepted, this principle of forming a separate human organization to do the work God commanded the church to do, resulted in the corruption of the worship by adding instrumental music and eventually led into complete apostasy and denominationalism. The same spirit of iniquity is at work today. Iniquity is simple disrespect for divine authority. Evidence of it is apparent on every hand.

Adapted From Roy Cogdill