

What Causes Institutionalism?

One of the fundamental mistakes made by “religious leaders” of the past was centralization. This has really been a problem throughout time. For example, in Genesis 11:1-9, the problem with the tower of Babel was a problem of centralization. Part of the problem with institutionalism is centralization and it is against God’s will because the authority for it does not exist.

Spreading the gospel by means of individual, autonomous groups of the Lord’s people is one of the greatest expressions of the wisdom of God (Ephesians 3:10-11). But within the last several decades, churches of Christ have transgressed God’s word by their support of institutions such as schools, orphans’ homes, nursing homes, hospitals, etc., to do the work the Lord intended for individuals (Galatians 6:10; James 1:27).

What fuels and supports the problem of institutionalism? Several reasons could probably be given. First, it was a problem with man believing they could improve the efficiency of God’s commands. If one church doing the work is good, two can be better. Therefore, the sponsoring church arrangement and human organizations were developed because Christians simply felt they could improve upon God’s commands. Second, many churches had and still have large treasuries and no work being done with them. Giving to institutions becomes an “easy” way to disperse funds. Third, individuals have often neglected to help the needy. Benevolent help was commanded under the Mosaic law (Deuteronomy 15:11; 24:14; Psalm 9:18; 12:5; 35:10; 37:14; 40:17; 86:1; 113:7; etc.). These three reasons combine together to make institutionalism seem like the right way to go to a lot of Christians.

We hopefully will not follow after the same example of disobedience as the previous generation. We must be content with the instructions God gave to the local church. We must use our contribution for only the purposes God intended. Furthermore, individually we need to practice some pure and undefiled religion which includes helping the fatherless, the widows, and the poor among all men.

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