

Myths About The Church Of Christ #1

Introduction. In our discussions with members of denominations, we can be burdened by misunderstandings about what they actually believe and practice. The separation that exists between the church called in the New Testament to be of Christ and all those bodies formed by and for men can have the effect of fostering mythology and exaggeration concerning others' beliefs. We must not be guilty of mischaracterizing the beliefs of others, but should focus on exposing only actual error.

Clearly, the same problem exists on the other side of these discussions. There is a mythology about what members of the church of Christ tend to believe, a mythology that leads to exaggerations and outright falsehoods. In this and tonight's lesson, we'll briefly examine six of the most common myths about the church of Christ and seek to find the truth behind them.

I. "You Don't Have Music in Your Worship"

- A. Actually, music is a very important part of our worship, and we each participate in our musical worship in the purest and most ancient form, a Capella singing.
- B. We know that instruments of music like the harp and tambourine were used in the Old Testament worship within the temple, but it must be admitted that New Testament worship is vastly different from worship under the Law of Moses.
 1. The burning of incense and slaughter of animals was as much a part of Old Testament worship as the playing of mechanical instruments.
 2. We do not perform these other rituals for the same reason we forgo worshipping God with musical instruments: the authority of Moses's Old Testament to regulate and instruct has been replaced completely by the authority of Christ's New Testament, which is silent on all three of these worship forms.
- C. Jesus was given all authority in heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18-20), becoming the church's sole lawgiver (James 4:12). Whatever we do, in word or deed, has to agree with that authority to be pleasing to God (Colossians 3:17).
 1. That authority is revealed in the New Testament, which is silent regarding any form of musical worship, save for that done by the human voice.
 2. And throughout the first century and long after, that authority was respected and musical instruments were kept out of worship.
 3. Not until 670 did a Catholic pope make an unsuccessful attempt to introduce it to corporate worship, and even into the nineteenth century it was widely condemned as unauthorized by God.
- D. The scriptures are plain regarding the authority of vocal music in praise to God. Playing psalms is part of Old Testament worship abolished along with burning incense, animal sacrifice, and Sabbath observance (John 10:34 quoted from Psalm 82:6; John 15:25 quoted from Psalm 69:4).
 1. We hear apostles and disciples singing (Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26; Acts 16:25; Hebrews 2:12).
 2. It is something God tells us to do as a sacrifice of the fruit of our lips to Him (Hebrews 13:15).

3. We hear the apostle Paul commanding it (Ephesians 5:18-19; Colossians 3:16).
- E. We can never find a single command to play an instrument to God, a single example of an individual or church doing it, or any possible inference that it could or should be done.
 1. And so our insistence on vocal music only is borne out of respect for the word of God and its absent approval of a worship form that only recently began to gain acceptance among men.
 2. It is a myth to suggest that we have no music in our worship.

II. “You Don’t Believe In Having Pastors”

- A. This is untrue and finds its root in a misunderstanding about who pastors are. We actually believe that churches of Christ which do not have pastors are lacking something God wants them to have.
- B. The common conception of a pastor is a product of hundreds of years of influence from the Catholic priest system, in which a single man has authority and influence over an entire church.
 1. In Protestantism, he is not a priest, but often is called “the pastor.”
 2. He is labeled a clergyman, usually wears a special title like “Reverend,” and sometimes even special clothing.
 3. In Protestant denominations, “the pastor” is in fact the preacher.
 4. But is this what the Bible describes as the identity and function of pastors?
- C. “Pastor” appears only in Ephesians 4:11 and is distinct from evangelists, teachers, and apostles. None of these words are used interchangeably; they refer to different offices.
 1. Pastor is from the Greek word *poimen*, which means “to shepherd a flock.”
 2. To ascertain the identity and function of pastors, we need only discover to whom the work of shepherding spiritual flocks was given.
 - a) In Acts 20:28, Paul told a group of men to shepherd the flock at Ephesus, which Christ had purchased with his own blood. Back in v. 17, we learn that he was speaking, not to the priest of Ephesus or a preacher in that great city, but “the elders of the church.”
 - b) Likewise, Peter addressed the elders of his audience in 1 Peter 5:1-4, instructing them to “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you.”
 3. The work of pastoring was never given to evangelists (or preachers), but to elders and there was always a plurality of them in any given place rather than this authority being vested in a single man.
- D. Furthermore, the titles attached to such men (i. e. “Reverend” or “Father”) and any special clergy clothing are without scriptural precedent and actually violate Matthew 23:6-10.
 1. The word “Reverend” is only used once in the King James Version and is applied there to the name of God (Psalm 111:9). To attach it to a man’s name is to elevate him beyond what is right (1 Corinthians 4:6).
 2. The New Testament calls all Christians priests (1 Peter 2:9) and makes no clergy/laity distinction. As obedient disciples, we submit to our pastors, but not in the way that Protestants do.

III. “You Don’t Believe In Salvation By Grace”

- A. This is another myth about members of the church of Christ, owing to the fact that we contend that no man can be justified by faith only (James 2:17-24).
 - 1. It seems a pretty secure conclusion on which to stand. But consider also that Jesus taught that a saving faith was a submissive one (Matthew 7:21).
 - 2. The wise man of Christ’s parable built his house on the rock by hearing and doing the will of God, not by hearing only and doing not.
- B. We believe that salvation is by grace, although the myth is that we do not, perhaps because we understand that grace is not nullified when God sets certain conditions for receiving the gift, which still do not constitute earning the gift.
 - 1. Most all will agree that faith is a condition of salvation, but even Jesus called faith doing the work of God (John 6:28-29).
 - 2. We would not be thought ungodly for suggesting also that repenting of one’s sins is a prerequisite to grace, taking our stand on Acts 3:19 and 2 Peter 3:9, among other passages.
 - 3. It is doubtful that any would have a problem with the suggestion a confession of faith predates the reception of grace (Romans 10:9).
 - 4. Each of these requires some effort on the part of the person seeking grace.
 - a) Faith requires a diligent search and an insistence on not settling for anything less than truth (Matthew 7:7-11; Hebrews 11:6).
 - b) Repentance requires self-discipline in overcoming sinful delights (1 Corinthians 9:27).
 - c) Confession requires more than the employment of facial muscles and the larynx, but sometimes the courage to overcome the objections of family and friends (Matthew 10:34-39; 1 Corinthians 15:33).
- C. The real objection lies in the matter of baptism, which Peter said “now saves you” (1 Peter 3:21) and is “for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38).
 - 1. Paul called it the act which placed people into the body of Christ (Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:27).
 - 2. Far from earning one his salvation, it is merely the duty of those seeking salvation in obedience to the faith (Luke 17:5-10; Romans 1:5; 16:26).
 - 3. Our submission to the Bible doctrine of one baptism (Ephesians 4:5) does not mean that we do not rely on grace for our salvation, for a dip in the pond is worthless if not attached to the saving blood of Jesus.

Conclusion. The Lord deserves a defense and a proclamation of pure truth, absent of people’s preconceived notions. These three myths are extremely significant in that they block people’s ability to know the truth. Therefore, you should arm yourself with knowledge and boldly proclaim it.

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