

## *Why Are There Other Churches Of Christ In Our Area?*

Many sincere people, members of the church and otherwise, have asked the question, "Why are there other churches of Christ in this area that you are not associated with?" Or, to me personally, "Why are you preaching for that 'little group' over there instead of one of the larger congregations?" In view of the continuing interest on this subject, I have deemed it expedient to explain some of the differences between the Buenaventura church of Christ and other congregations in this area.

In order to clear the air, I want to state some of the things that *are not* involved in this discussion. Some have said that our differences are based on such things as personal hatred, racism, taking care of orphaned children, preaching the gospel over radio or TV, or the disruption of happy families. Although these are some of the charges hurled against us, they are patently false. We do not hate anybody, much less our brethren. If there is any animosity between us and any other congregation in this area, it is *one-sided*, and we have nothing to do with it. Racial prejudice has no place in the life of *any* Christian, and consequently, we welcome warmly any person, no matter what their ancestry may be. We *do* believe that care should be provided for orphaned children, whether in private homes or otherwise. Likewise, we believe that it is scriptural to preach and teach the gospel on the radio or the television; only a lack of adequate funding prevents us from doing so ourselves at this time. We believe that families in which the husband and wife have permission from God in His Word to be married one to another should remain intact. However, we do not believe that anyone can be pleasing to God, and thus in fellowship with God's children, when they persist in a relationship which God has not approved.

With these preliminary remarks out of the way, let's deal with the principles upon which this congregation stands, and show why adherence to them has of necessity separated us from the other churches of Christ in this area. I believe that the Bible points to several basic reasons why we exist and do not join ourselves to one of the other congregations. I would like to list them and make some comments concerning them. Whether the brethren in these other groups agree with these reasons or not, I know that the knowledgeable among them will have to admit in all honesty that they are true. All of the reasons will not apply to all of the congregations, and those which do apply may not apply to the same degree. But the reasons do exist, and they are indeed valid distinctions.

### *Bible Authority*

**Reason 1:** We differ on what constitutes legitimate religious authority. According to the Bible (1 Corinthians 4:6; 2 John 9 and many others), Bible authority is inclusive and thus mutually exclusive. When we stray beyond this, we are beyond God's approval. My brethren in the other churches of Christ do not believe this principle, whether they will admit it or not. They function on the basis of "If God has not forbidden it, He has thus allowed it." The Bible teaches that if God has not allowed it, He has surely forbidden it! Those familiar with the subject of authority in the Bible recognize that we must have a direct statement or command, approved example or necessary inference in order to KNOW whether any practice or doctrine has authority from God. The difference in approach between what we practice and what many other congregations practice is that they believe that when God does not specifically condemn something, it is authorized. We believe that if God did not authorize it, it is wrong. This is indeed the first thing that separates us.

### *God's All-Sufficiency*

**Reason 2:** The Bible teaches the all-sufficiency of God in religion in all aspects. This is to say that Christ is an all-sufficient Savior; the Bible is an all-sufficient revelation; the church is all-sufficient in the worship that God expects and demands from it; the church both has an all-sufficient mission and that it is completely capable (if it *will*) of carrying congregationally. And finally, the church in its local organization in the Bible is all-sufficient (thus God prohibits any other religious organization, whatever its form may be). Our brethren, whom we regard with love in Christ, but whom we also regard as liberal with respect to these principles, do not agree with some or all of these points. For example, if they believed in the all-sufficiency of Christ as a Savior and the church as the Body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22,23), they would see no other organization through which to exercise their function. Additionally, some have decided that the Bible must prohibit before a thing is displeasing to God, thus His revelation, in their eyes, is inadequate. Others are questioning the acts of worship which have characterized the church of Christ from its beginning nearly 2,000 years ago. They are now no longer willing to oppose the introduction of man-made innovations. Still others doubt the all-sufficiency of the mission of the local congregation. The Bible, the Word of God,

charges each congregation with the teaching of itself in the direction of spiritual maturity, providing for its own needy and teaching others the truth of the gospel. Our brethren want to add to these. Because of this, some are doubting the completeness of the organization which God gave each congregation. In the New Testament, each local work was made up of members (saints), deacons (servers), and bishops (elders or rulers)- as far as "organization" went, there was *that and no more!* (The preacher or evangelist is merely one of the members who has no authority as do the elders.) Those who refuse to restrict themselves to what God has revealed have added in great variety to these. They have whatever officers they deem necessary to do the additional work which by their own wisdom they have included in the work of the church. Some have introduced "committees" by which they guide the affairs of the local church. All of these are without divine authority.

### ***MISSION OF THE CONGREGATION***

**Reason 3:** The Bible teaches that the church has the functions briefly given in Ephesians 6:12, "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." That is ALL! It also teaches that the church is all-sufficient to accomplish these ends. Brethren have made the mistake of deciding that since some congregations do not do all of these things to their satisfaction, that God is also displeased. They fail to realize that responsibility is a mixture of opportunity and ability. If the lack of one or the other of these exists, you have no responsibility. If the cause of failure is beyond this, those involved need to straighten themselves out. But instead of this, they engage in such "reasoning" as "I know that this is the responsibility of the individual, but you know that not all individuals fulfill their responsibilities, so the church has to do it for them." This is actually the essence of what was said by one of the deacons of a digressive congregation when he came face to face with the facts of the Bible. In attempts to accomplish their ends, and satisfy their purposes, my brethren have employed a variety of human organizations. But these, almost without exception, are larger than the local congregation, and require financial support from many congregations. Thus brethren have activated the church universal, which is something which God has never authorized. The largest working collective in the New Testament for God's work that is authorized, organized and approved by Him, is the local congregation. It is the smallest and the largest working collective that the Bible knows anything about.

### ***CONGREGATIONAL AUTONOMY***

**Reason 4:** This is a critical consideration. The New Testament teaches that each local church is separate and autonomous (possessed of the power of self-rule) and totally without ties, organic or otherwise with any other congregation! My brethren do not respect this principle, and tie themselves to each other for various purposes all the way from building and maintaining organizations for benevolent purposes to making contributions to colleges for secular education. In some instances, such congregations have taken over the running of other congregations; others have willingly given themselves over to the control of another. God teaches us that each congregation, regardless of size, is an independent entity, totally separate from all other congregations, in its worship, work and organization.

### ***DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUAL AND LOCAL CHURCH ACTION***

**Reason 5:** The New Testament makes a clear distinction between those responsibilities imposed on individual Christians and functional groups of Christians (local churches). The fact that some tasks are required of both the individual and the church does not in any way mar this distinction. God will hold Christians accountable in terms of personal responsibilities in both relationships. One of our brethren's favorite sayings is "what the individual does, the church does: what the church does, the individual does." The only thing wrong with this saying is that nothing about it is true! One simple illustration will demonstrate this to be evident. I am a husband and am commanded by God to love my wife. The church as a collective body is to love each of its members. Christians as individuals are to love one another. When I leave on a trip, and kiss my wife, no one in control of their faculties would conclude that this is the church loving my wife. But this is what the position that our brethren hold requires us to conclude.

### ***INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF CHRISTIANS***

**Reason 6:** Many if not most of the responsibilities Christians have in this life are individual in nature. The fact that we also have some which are collective does not change this in the least. But organizing seems to be the order of the day. In their minds, our brethren have confused modern human thinking with what the Bible teaches, and the Bible is the loser! There is no way that the local church where I am a member can do the things which God requires of me as an individual, and be within the bounds of

divine authority. For example, I am to love my brother in Christ. This means I am to seek his greatest good, then do it. Even if the local church sets out to find this greatest good, then does it and says it is doing it for me, but I have anger or hatred in my heart toward this one, the church cannot possibly erase this feeling by what it has done. Possibly the greatest fallacy in this thinking is it reduces the life of a Christian to nothing more than "religion by proxy." If I throw a few more dollars in the collection plate, the church has a program for helping someone that I have a responsibility to help, and I can be deceived into believing that I am practicing the "pure religion" of James 1:27. Nothing could be further from the truth! All I have done is dumped the responsibility that God gave me onto the local church, and done so without God's permission or approval!

### ***WORDS, WORKS, GOVERNMENT AND WORSHIP***

**Reason 7:** The pattern of apostasy throughout history as we find it recorded in both the Old and the New Testaments is always the same. It starts with the misuse of words; progresses from there to the misuse of these words to describe some work that brethren want to engage in, but cannot justify from the Scriptures. It goes further, then, to adjusting the government of the congregation to the "new work." For after all, when we have a work, there must be a worker, and people like titles. This generally takes two generations to accomplish, because our brethren, like everyone else, are loaded with prejudices. The movement must be slow enough so those who cling to the idea (but not the application) of having Bible authority for our work will not be unduly disturbed. Then the payoff comes in the third generation, step number four. The acts of worship are changed also to please the desires of the group members rather than leaving them as God has authorized. Sometimes this can be accomplished in fewer generations where there is already a lack of respect evident among those who are elders, deacons and preachers, for divine authority.

### ***APOSTASY***

**Reason 8:** Our brethren disagree on what constitutes apostasy. According to the New Testament, once people have gone beyond the limits of the written Word of God, they no longer have God (2 John 9). We are restricted to what the Lord has caused to be written (John 20:30,32; 1 Corinthians 4:6). The Scriptures furnish us completely unto every good work (2 Timothy 3:16,17; Colossians 3:17) and we must do all that we do in matters of religion by the authority of Christ. Thus if a particular work is not furnished (i.e. instructed concerning) in the New Testament, it simply is not a good work! This is true regardless of what man thinks. To refuse to be limited to only what God's Word has given us in the pages of the Bible is ***APOSTASY***.

### ***FELLOWSHIP***

**Reason 9:** In an effort to find ways to "get along" with each other, and in some cases, with the religious world in general, some of our brethren are advocating the extension of fellowship beyond the boundaries established by our Lord. Arbitrarily, certain doctrinal differences are designated as being acceptable and thus "fellowship" can continue with those who are not in agreement. As a result, it is not uncommon to find some congregations who regularly engage the services of preachers whose beliefs are diametrically opposed to one another. An attempt to do this was made several years ago, which resulted in one preacher who was invited to reconsider his participation in the meeting. When he said that the only way he would come is if he was free to preach on the subject of his choice, he was told that he would not be allowed to participate under those conditions. Yet, in the minds of some, congregations like this are still considered to be "sound" or "faithful." We believe that the bible is clear on this subject. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:10 that we are to "all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." Further, he told the brethren in Ephesus, in Ephesians 5:11, to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them." It is for this reason that we cannot establish or continue fellowship with those who have espoused that which is contrary to the will of God. Rather, we are obligated to "expose them" for what they are, and pray that they will turn away from their error, and return to the Lord.

Do we like the situation we find among churches of Christ today? Most assuredly, we do not. We do, however, understand that it is necessary if some are not content with the purity and simplicity of God's word. Jesus made this clear when He said, "Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division. 52 "For from now on five in one house will be divided: three against two, and two against three. 53 "Father will be divided against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law." (Luke 12:51-53) Truth cannot abide where error is tolerated. We stand ready at all times

to sit down and discuss God's word with any who wish to find the truth revealed therein. If we should find that we are in error on any point, we will gladly repent and change what we teach and practice. We would hope that those with whom we study would be willing to do the same.

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