

PRACTICES IN MANY CHURCHES OF CHRIST THAT ARE INDEFENSIBLE

By Donald Townsley

Churches of Christ are organic, functional entities (Rom. 16:16). Two of the distinctive features of churches of Christ are that they are **equal** and **independent** bodies. They are equal in foundation (I Cor. 3:11), in head (Eph. 1: 22 -23), in structure (Eph. 2:22; I Pet. 2: 5 - 9), in identity (Rev. 1:20), in work (each congregation has been assigned the same work), and in organization (Phil. 1: 1; Acts 14:23). Each congregation is independent of every other congregation. These churches are pleasing to God only when they continually strive to do the will of God (Matt. 7:21; Rev. 3: 14 - 22). They have no legislative power, and therefore must ever look to their head, Christ, for authority (Eph. 1: 22 -23; Matt. 28:18).

The Bible teaches that churches of Christ can depart from New Testament teaching and practice (Acts 20: 28 - 31; I Tim. 4: 1 - 4; II Thess. 2: 3 - 7; Rev. 2: 1- 5; 3: 14 - 22). It is with great sadness that I must admit many churches of Christ are practicing many things for which they have no New Testament authority! I will not defend the practices of these churches because it is my duty as a Christian to defend the faith (Jude 3), and to reprove and rebuke the departures (II Tim. 4:2). I will lose my soul if I defend the unscriptural practices of my brethren (II John 9 - 11). Following are some of the practices in many churches of Christ today that I will not defend.

I WILL NOT DEFEND THE "SPONSORING CHURCH" ARRANGEMENT

In the New Testament you do not find one congregation ever giving to another congregation to do a work that both congregations were equally related to. In New Testament times the receiving church was always in want (or need -- unable to do its own work) when it received help from another congregation (Acts 11: 27 - 30; I Cor. 16: 1-2; 2 Cor. 8 & 9; Rom. 15: 26 - 27). When the need was met in the congregation, the help was stopped.

To show that the "sponsoring church" type cooperation is not scriptural, let us illustrate it with baptism: For baptism to be **scriptural** it must be (1) the **proper action** (immersion) -- Rom. 6: 3 - 4), (2) The **proper subject** (a penitent believer -- Acts 2:38), and (3) the **right design** (for the remission of sins -- Acts 2:38). If you do not have the **proper action**, the **proper subject** and the **right design** you do not have scriptural baptism. Let us look at what constitutes **unscriptural** baptism: (1) action (sprinkling or pouring), (2) subject (infants or unbelievers), and (3) design (because of remission of sins). Now let us look at **scriptural** congregational cooperation: (1) The proper action (church with abundance giving to a church in want -- Acts 11: 27 - 30; II Cor. 8:14), (2) The proper subject (church in want (or need) receiving from a church with abundance), and (3) the right design ("*that there may be equality*" 2 Cor. 8:14 -- to bring the church in want to the place that it can do its own work). Now **unscriptural** cooperation: (1) action (gift from one church to another), (2) subject (church having equality -- not in want (or need)), and (3) design (to do a good work). Unscriptural congregational cooperation is no more pleasing in the sight of God than is unscriptural baptism!

The "sponsoring church" arrangement is an unscriptural arrangement of churches. In the "sponsoring church" arrangement you have five things: (1) contributing churches, (2) money they contribute, (3) the sponsoring church, (4) the **means** used to do the work, and (5) the work. Remove any one of these five things, and you destroy the "sponsoring church" arrangement. This arrangement is a cooperative effort on the part of churches of Christ to enable them to **jointly act** in doing some work they are all equally related to. There is no scriptural authority for forming congregations in such an arrangement so that the church universal can act!

I WILL NOT DEFEND "SYNODS" AMONG CHURCHES OF CHRIST

A "synod" is "a meeting or assembly of ecclesiastics or church delegates for mutual deliberation on matters affecting the churches to which they belong, and designed for their guidance". (*Webster New Twentieth Century Dictionary*). You cannot read of such an organization in the New Testament. The oversight of elders begins and ends with the church where they are elders (I Pet. 5: 1 - 3; Acts 20:28). But today it is not uncommon to read about two or three elderships having a meeting together to deliberate on matters of some general work they are all involved in. In these joint meetings decisions are made and plans are set forth for work that is to be executed. These "synods" violate the autonomy of the local church (I Pet. 5: 2 - 3). God made no arrangement for any organization larger than the local church with its elders (Phil. 1:1; Acts 14: 23). When elders of two or three churches come together to transact business, you have an organization **larger** than a local church! This type organization is known in the denominational world as a "synod".

I WILL NOT DEFEND "CHURCH-SPONSORED" ENTERTAINMENT

It is not the mission of the New Testament church to entertain saints or sinners. The mission of the church in the world is to preach the gospel to the lost (I Tim. 3:15; Phil. 1:5; 4: 14 - 17; Mark 16:15 - 16); to edify its members (Eph. 4: 11 -16); and to minister to its own in time of need (Acts 2: 44 - 45; 4:32; 6: 1 - 6; I Cor. 16: 1 - 2; Rom. 15: 25 - 27; Acts 11: 27 - 30; I Tim. 5:16). There is no scripture that authorizes the church to go into the entertainment business. This being the case, we must respect the silence of the scriptures (I Pet. 4:11; 2 John 9). The idea that we can do a thing because it is not expressly forbidden in the scriptures creates respect for what the Bible **does not say** rather than what it **does say**! When one's actions in religion are governed by the assumption that he can do what is not expressly forbidden, the field is wide open. Through this door comes instrumental music in worship, "praying through Mary", baptizing babies, etc., ad infinitum.

Entertainment is not "church business", it is home (or family) business. Paul tells the Corinthians that they had houses to eat and drink in (I Cor. 11: 22 , 34). From these passages we learn this TRUTH -- Christians have houses (or homes) to eat and drink in , so the social aspect of life is family business and God does not want the social business of the family mixed in with the spiritual business of the church.

I WILL NOT DEFEND SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES IN THE BUDGETS OF CHURCHES OF CHRIST

Brother Batsell Barrett Baxter (and many others) teach that churches of Christ should put the colleges operated by the brethren in the budgets of the churches. Brethren, colleges and schools operated by the brethren are private business enterprises. They are human institutions. There is no scriptural authority for a church to donate funds to human institutions. There is no command, no example, no necessary inference in God's word for such. It is unscriptural and therefore wrong for a church to donate funds to human institutions because the church itself is sufficient to do everything God authorizes it to do.

There was a time when churches of Christ as a whole practiced New Testament Christianity, and their practice could be defended with the New Testament. This is not true anymore. There are many practices in many churches of Christ that I will not defend. There is not defense for them because they are not authorized in God's will for us today -- the New Testament.

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