

# THE BELLEVILLE MESSENGER

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## Institutionalism: Why I Changed

One of the most difficult decisions I ever made in my life was my decision to take a stand against institutionalism. I believed, as perhaps many of you who shall read this article believe, that the support of human institutions (such as orphan's homes, colleges, hospitals etc.) should come from the church's treasury because of the good they were doing. I based this solely on the emotional appeal that was made for those who were orphans, the sick, etc., and on human reasoning rather than Scriptural facts. Yet, my desire to **BE RIGHT** forced me to take a stand against church support of human institutions. Jesus said, *"If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed."* (John 8:31). I knew all along I must abide in the doctrine of Christ in order to be His disciple. *"He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son."* (2 John 9).

I want each one who reads this article to know that I understand your problem and the pressures that are placed on you by these institutional brethren, for I faced the same sort of problem.

I was living in Chattanooga, Tennessee at the time. I had been troubled about my stand for several months. Yet, I was not about to allow myself to be labeled an "ANTI" unless I was **absolutely sure** I was right. I had several questions that were asked by several of my preaching brethren who opposed Human Institutions, that I was unable to answer. I began to ask many of my preacher friends, elders, and others, (who believed as I did) to help me find the answers to these problems that I had encountered. Some refused to discuss the matter, and others made attempts to answer, and yet the answers were not Scriptural answers. For example:

- Where in the Bible, did one church ever send money to **another church** to preach the gospel? No answer was given!
- Where is Scriptural authority for a church making a donation to any kind of a human institution? No answer, was given!

- Where is Bible authority for elders overseeing any work except that "Which is among them" (1 Pet. 5:2)? No answer was given!
- Where is the authority for the church engaging in providing suppers, parties, or entertainment for anyone? No answer was given!

If any effort was ever made to answer these, it was usually **James 1:27** or **Gal. 6:10**. Actually, the more I heard these passages used by my brethren to support these practices of taking money from the church's treasury to support human institutions, the more convinced I was that I was wrong. It is really an **insult** to any persons's intelligence to quote the above passages to try to prove **church action** when the passages themselves are giving instructions to the individual Christian and his living of the Christian life. Read them and see for yourselves.

But, as I said, I know your problems. When I took my stand against these "church splitting innovations," one of my dearest friends who was a gospel preacher said, "I hope and pray J. T. **quits his preaching**." Not only this, but I was told by the congregation in Chattanooga where I was preaching one Sunday morning, that that would be my last day. I was left without any means of supporting my family, I was faced with being in opposition to many of my dearest friends and many in my own family. I immediately became an "orphan hater" to hear my friends(?) tell it. Yet I was comforted by the fact that regardless of what people call you, **GOD IS RIGHT!!** *"In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began;"* (Tit. 1:2). I also knew that God said *"seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.."* (Matt 6:33). **THAT IS WHY I CHANGED --- JESUS SAID I MUST!** *"And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me."* (Matt. 10:36-38). In the light of this, I could not allow friends or family to stand in the way of my being right. Yes, I lost much ---- but I gained much more. I gained a position that I can support by the Bible. I can give Scriptural authority (command, example, necessary inference) for my teaching and practice. I am now not afraid to try to defend what I believe. **ALL INSTITUTIONAL PREACHERS ARE!!!!** I know why they won't defend it. **THEY CAN'T!!** I know, because I tried!!! I **wanted** to be able to defend it as much as anyone ever did. It grieved me much to have my friends turn their back on me.

All of you who read this publication or who have read my writings in the past, know that I am still trying to obtain the answers

to the questions that I stated earlier in this article. It would be a happy day in my life if I could call those who are so bitterly opposed to me, and join hands and hearts with them again. Yet, with all the pleas I have made for Bible authority for these things since I arrived in Oklahoma City, NOT ONE SINGLE PERSON has even TRIED to give me Scriptural authority for these things. Therefore, I will have to continue to speak out against institutionalism and those who espouse it, as much as I dislike being in opposition to my brethren. But Paul said, *"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."* (Eph. 5:11). Thus, I must do this to be pleasing to God. If I preach anything that was not received from God, His curses will rest upon me. (Gal. 1:8-9). And, if I do not abide in the doctrine of Christ, I **cannot have God.** (2 John 9).

So, as you can well see, I can sympathize with your situation, and feel sorry for you. I know it will be hard, but you too **MUST** take your stand against institutionalism and against anything for which you cannot find Bible authority. I BEG OF YOU -- PLEASE stand up against these innovations, or else give me Scriptural Authority for your practices SO THAT I MAY STAND WITH YOU!!!  
*✍ J. T. Smith*



## LEARNING FROM CHRISTMAS??

In years past at about this time each year you would find many articles concerning the celebration of Christmas in church bulletins. These articles would usually call attention to the fact that there is no Bible authority for the celebration of any day as the birthday of Jesus and that no one knows the exact day of His birth. They would also point out that the celebration of Christmas was started in paganism and Roman Catholicism.

Now we are seeing articles in church bulletins upholding the celebration and announcements of Christmas activities. You would expect to find such in the bulletins of denominational churches, however it is surprising to find such in the bulletins of churches which identify themselves as churches of Christ. I received one such bulletin some time ago from a church in a neighboring county which contained announcements of "Upcoming Events." These events included a *"Teen Christmas Party"* and *"Congregational Christmas Carolling."* Another article I received suggested things we could

"take advantage of" and "learn from" the celebration of Christmas. Some of the points were good. For example, the writer suggested that we could make the same use of the celebration of Christmas as Paul made of the idol to the "unknown god" in Athens. By taking advantage of the people's interest in Jesus we could direct their attention to the truth. Surely this would be a commendable thing to do. However, do we do this by becoming a participant in that which is wrong? Of course not! Paul did not join in the activities connected with the worship of idols so that he might teach the truth.

There are some other things we can learn from the celebration of Christmas. We learn that when men enjoy doing something it usually doesn't matter to them that the thing may not be authorized. We learn of the influence the Catholic Church has had upon the whole of the religious world. What was begun by the Catholic Church is now almost universally accepted. We learn that something wrong can be made to appear to be something good and wonderful. Of course, we could also learn this by reading the story of Adam and Eve in the Bible. That was exactly how the serpent was successful in getting Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit.

I think the words of Paul in Ephesians 5:11 are very appropriate at this time. *"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."*  
*✍ James Hahn*

***Belleville church of Christ***  
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<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Schedule of Services</b></p> <p>Sun. Bible Study. . . . . 9:30 a.m.          Sun. Morning Worship. . . . 10:30 a.m.          Sun. Evening Worship. . . . . 5:00 p.m.          Wed. Bible Study. . . . . 7:00 p.m.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Elders</b></p> <p>Charles Carpenter. . . . (317) 839-3873          James Hahn. . . . . (317) 745-1507</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Evangelist</b></p> <p>James Hahn. . . . . (317) 745-1507</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Deacons</b></p> <p>Leon Nevins . . . . . (317) 272-2966          Don Perry. . . . . (765) 676-5825          Alvin Stanley. . . . . (317) 831-3514</p>