

THE BELLEVILLE MESSENGER

December 18

2022

Beware of Institutionalism

Institutionalism can be defined as: “the practice of forming an organization for a religious, educational, social, or similar purpose.” Unfortunately, there are some local churches in our surrounding area today who call themselves a church of Christ, who are participants in providing money from their treasury to enable man made institutions such as missionary societies, orphan homes, colleges, and such; to spread the gospel, to care for the orphaned, to provide an education to those who desire one, and to provide entertainment and recreation for the youth.

Now, some may be thinking, this sounds like a good work to me, so what’s the problem with this? Well, the problem with this practice is a failure to make a proper distinction between the work of the church and the work of an individual. You see, although many fail to make a proper distinction between the work of the church and the work of an individual, we all must recognize, and understand that there is a distinction between the work of the church and the work of an individual (1 Timothy 5:16; Galatians 6:10, James 1:26-27). Therefore, those who desire to please the Lord must abide in His doctrine, and they must not twist, add to, nor take away from His doctrine (2 John 9).

Another problem with this practice is, it is an unscriptural practice. You see, it is not lawful for a church to practice something that is not authorized by the Lord (Colossians 3:17). Therefore, no church has the authority to send funds from their treasury to support some kind of organization just because they deem it as being a good work. Knowing this, all churches who desire to please the Lord must do as He says (Luke 6:46), they must adhere to and have a proper respect for Bible authority, and they must always seek to do God’s will, rather than their own will (Matthew 7:21-23).

My friend, the early church that we read about in our New Testament was sufficient in the preaching, spreading, and supporting of the gospel without forming any kind of missionary society (Acts 11-22-23, 13:1-14; Philippians 4:15-16). The early church was able to provide for it’s own needy without the help of any kind of man made organization (Acts 6:1-6, 11:27-30; Romans 15:25-26; 2 Corinthians 8 and 9). Likewise, the early church was equipped to provide it’s saints with edification without the help of any organizations that was founded by men (Ephesians 4:11-16). So, just as the early church was sufficient in providing for the authorized collective work (i.e. evangelism, edification, benevolence for the needy saints) that has been placed upon it, so is the church today.

Therefore, my friend, beware of institutionalism! Do not participate in it, nor fellowship those who do (Ephesians 5:11; 2 John 9-11), and do not allow this unscriptural practice to rob the church of the work (i.e. evangelism, edification, benevolence for the needy saints) that God has designed it to do, to the glory of God. (Ephesians 3:20-21).

✍ Brad Phillips

When You Read The Scriptures

Paul said, “Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ” (Ephesians 3:4). The Bible can be understood if we will learn how to study. A few simple rules will help us as we study.

Read the Bible knowing that it is inspired of God.

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). The Scriptures are authoritative. Christ has all authority (Matthew 28:18).

When you read the Scriptures, ask, “Who is doing the speaking?”

In Genesis 3:4 we can read, “Ye shall not surely die.” If I know the Devil said this, then I will have no trouble understanding that this is not a true statement.

We need to know to whom the message is spoken when we read the Scriptures.

Sometimes the Bible speaks to the Jews as under the Law of Moses, sometimes to the man, sometimes to the woman, sometimes to elders of the church, or the deacons. Some passages have their application in the life of the individual, like in the story of the Good Samaritan, and some to the church as a group.

One must love the truth when he reads the Scriptures.

Paul said that some “perished because they received not the love of the truth” (2 Thessalonians 2:10). Truth cannot be handled carelessly. If one loves the truth, he will study and accept the truth as it is without trying to pervert it.

When you read the Scriptures, read the context.

This simply means read the passage before and after the one you are trying to understand.

Read all on a given subject.

You will not understand the truth unless you read all that God has said about a given topic. For example, when you study the subject of faith, you should read every passage on the subject of faith. No passage contradicts another, but all Scriptures harmonize one with another.

John said, “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand” (Revelation 1:3).

Johnie Edwards

Belleville church of Christ

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Schedule of Services

Sunday Bible Study	9:30 a.m.
Sunday Morning Worship	10:30 a.m.
Sunday Evening Worship	4:00 p.m.
Wednesday Bible Study	7:00 p.m.

Elders

David Lockhart	(317) 714-6213
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Evangelist

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