

Should I Have Left Denominationalism?

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Introduction: We should never be afraid to distinguish between human traditions and the will of God.

- A. We are hearing more and more about how churches have become “traditional” and how we need to leave “the traditional position.”
 - 1. The call to leave human traditions is a Biblical call.
(Mt 15:8-9, 1 Pt 1:18-19)
 - 2. When people label things as human tradition without a willingness to open the Bible and test their assertion then a new human tradition is in the making.
- B. Several years ago I was challenged to look at the Bible alone and take a stand to simply be a Christian.
 - 1. This stand was motivated out of a faith in Jesus Christ. **(1 John 5:1-3)**
 - 2. The study of God’s word became one of searching and making changes in my life. I was not afraid to give up past practices.

I. Why I left Denominationalism

- A. Love for my Lord demanded that I surrender things that divide. **(Jn 17:20-23)**
 - 1. I was raised in a religious body that had good sincere people in it.
 - 2. Why does division exist? What can I possibly do as a single individual?
- B. One of my first challenges came as I examined the Lord’s Supper.
(Mt 26:26-28)
 - 1. In the Baptist church I never remember partaking of it.
 - 2. Driving home from Samford University I heard a radio sermon on the subject. The early church met on the first day of the week!
(Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:1-2)
 - 3. I tried to imperfectly practice what I had learned.
- C. While attending the University of Alabama I heard a basic presentation on how Jesus directed men to be saved. **(Mk 16:15-16)**
 - 1. It was important not to base your conclusion on just one verse. What did Peter preach? **(Acts 2:38)**
 - 2. As I examined all the verses on this subject, I found that whenever baptism and salvation (forgiveness of sins) are mentioned together that baptism always is placed before salvation. **(1 Pt 3:20-21)**
 - 3. After studying and asking further questions I decided to be baptized into Christ and take a stand to be just a Christian. **(Acts 19:1-4)**
 - 4. Was I right in doing that?

II. Many churches are giving up that stand

- A. I came to realize that the call to be undenominational was not taken seriously.
 - 1. After leaving the Baptist church I tried to apply what I learned to all differences! **(2 Tim 3:16-17)**
 - 2. I tried to take all the verses on a given subject and stay within whatever

that teaches. (Col 3:17, 2 Jn 9)

3. I was shocked to find that brethren were fearful of such a study. Many became angry because I simply asked to study over an open Bible.
 4. The most difficult decision I ever made spiritually was to leave that church.
- B. 25 years later I was shocked to hear that the University church of Christ in Tuscaloosa invited Tony Campolo to be a keynote speaker.
1. I was stunned to hear the preachers there were making the very arguments that I had heard from the Baptist church.
 2. Even today members from the Baptist church are welcomed into their membership with no challenges to their baptism.
- C. Are we not far behind?
1. In recent months I have known several to have left faithful churches and become a part of the University church and others like it.
 2. I have witnessed the arguments and attitudes of some as they openly participate in on-line discussion groups and post in their blogs.

III. Common arguments that are made against undenominational Christianity

- A. That insistence upon having book, chapter and verse for a practice is “legalism” and a “church of Christ tradition.”
1. There are many ways this attack is made. Some attack what they call the “hermeneutic of CENI” (command, example and necessary inference).
 2. Others have called us “propositional Baconians” claiming that we have created laws that God never intended. Another term used is “patternist”
 3. Others have talked about “endless division” because of our insistence for Bible authority. How about asking them to give ONE example!
- B. Consider these quotes from Consider the following quotes from: “**The Church in Transition**” by James S. Woodroof.

"A DREAM OF JUDGMENT"

For silence surely doth forbid!

In silence Thy commands are hid. " my servant wrote, "
said Christ to me, "For freedom Christ has set us free.

Be not ensnared in bondage yoke

Which we as well our fathers broke.

But you have stood right in the way

Of righteous men; you've stood to say,

'Touch not, taste not, and handle not.

And by your laws have brought to nought Good works;

and men that would be saved Are lost still,

for they did not have The gospel preached to them,

because You made men tarry for your cause.

"Oh! Hellish cause, that makes men think

The dipper's more concern than drink;

That leaves men dying in their thirst

While what is least is put as first.
What matters if by plastic cup,
Or dipper, bucket, glass, teacup?
When men are thirsty men demand
To drink by any means at hand.
Why put you words into My mouth
In places where I did not bid?

**For silence neither gives consent,
Nor yet does silence e'er forbid."**

THE CHURCH IN TRANSITION, P. 187

1. Does following the instructions of **Col 3:17** leave men "dying in thirst"?
Where is our brother's evidence?
 2. May we "do evil that good may come"? (**Rom 3:8**)
 3. There are many "assumptions" in this poem. In essence, if the church has problems then it must be a product of a belief in "patterns". Does this poem speak for God? Where has He thus spoke?
- C. That we should have fellowship with all who claim faith in Jesus Christ.
1. Before we extend fellowship we must make a judgment as to whether they are faithful to God. (**1 John 1:5-7**)
 2. We need to ask: "Is this one a Christian?" (**Acts 2:38, 9:26**)
 3. We also need to ask: "Is this one a faithful Christian?"
(**1 John 3:4-10; Eph 5:11**)
 4. Why does this church exist? What is the primary reason for our relationship with one another? It is not the "restoration heritage" but the cross of Christ! (**Gal 6:14**)

IV. How can we continue to practice simple New Testament Christianity?

- A. We must let our focus be upon God and not upon the writings of men!
(Ex. Preachers luncheon, internet outlines)
1. There is nothing wrong in asking for and insisting upon "the truth."
 2. Some may be like Pilate and deny any such possibility. (**Jn 18:38**)
 3. Are we like Pilate or like Jesus? "Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice" (**Jn 18:37**)
- B. It is not "legalism" or "traditionalism" to pursue a principled life based upon definitive answers found in the word of God.
1. New Testament Christians would have been startled that anyone would ever question the need to seek the truth about all things God revealed.
 2. Consider how the Apostle John described Christians in **2 John**.
 - a. "all those who have known the truth" (**1:1**)
 - b. "the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever" (**1:2**)
 - c. "I rejoiced greatly that I have found *some* of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father" (**1:4**)
 3. Later John plainly wrote that we need to know if "we are of the truth."

(1 Jn 3:19)

- C. We must not be afraid of open challenges and controversy.
1. When leaving liberalism I attempted to get others to open the Bible and discuss differences, almost everyone refused and most of those did so with anger.
 2. People who do not seek and fight for the truth will not have it in their hearts. **(Jn 3:19-21)**
- D. Those who are of the truth fight to keep a pure conscience. **(Titus 1:14-16)**
1. A hardened heart does not care anymore. They will use ridicule and name calling. (Ex. Discussion lists)
 2. I am seeing more and more cases where a Christian who questions a practice is branded as an “enforcer” or a “troublemaker.”
 3. Those that are “of the truth” may come to be pilgrims and strangers in churches that have long since departed from the truth!
 4. How many elderships are more interested in ‘keeping the peace’ rather than “keeping the Truth?” **(1 Jn 2:3-6)**

Conclusion: Who do I really want to have fellowship with?

- A. While some say they want to be right with God, they in fact want to please men. **(Gal 1:10)**
1. While we may fool men, God knows our heart!
 2. I have talked with men about what was right and what they needed to do. Even though they have agreed with me, I have often heard the refusal to stand rationalized like this: “It is hard to do what is right!”
- B. What will heaven be like?
1. It will be filled with men of faith who at times had to stand alone. **(Heb 11:32-38)**
 2. Have you heard of these men?
 - a. Sethur? Gaddiel? Palti? Shaphat? Nahbi?
 - b. How about these men? Caleb? Joshua?

A DISTURBING CONVERSATION

Todd Clippard

I hesitate to write this, but conscience, and more importantly scripture, necessitate it.

As many of you are aware, the **University Church of Christ in Tuscaloosa, Alabama** has invited **Baptist preacher Tony Campolo** to speak at this year's **Youth in Action (YIA)** in Birmingham, Alabama. The date is the weekend of December 27. Many false teachers and other apostates have been invited in years' past, including this year's lineup with **Jeff Walling, Buddy Bell** and **Acappella**, just to name a few.

I called the University church on three occasions in an attempt to speak with someone about the lineup, and about Mr. Campolo in particular. What follows are some of the responses I received during my inquiry.

I talked with two different ministers of the University church (one on Friday and one today) and each was asked this question: Are you aware that Tony Campolo is not a Christian?

Reply from the first: "He's not affiliated with the churches of Christ. I think he's a Baptist, but more non-denominational than Baptist. I don't know what he teaches in regard to the plan of salvation."

This was as far as I got with the first minister. He requested that I call the youth minister on Monday (today 8-25-98) and speak with him. So I did exactly that. The second minister was the organizer of YIA. When I asked him if he was aware that Tony Campolo was not a Christian, I received the following reply: "You mean he's not a member of the church of Christ." To which I replied, "What's the difference?" His response, "I believe God is a lot bigger than the Church of Christ. A person doesn't have to be a member of the Church of Christ to be a Christian." (I realize God is much bigger than the church, but this is not what he meant. He meant the church was a lot bigger than the church of Christ.)

I asked him if Mr. Campolo was going to extend the invitation, and if so, what would he say? Reply: "He is only going to tell people that if they want someone to pray with them, they can go to designated prayer rooms outside the auditorium." (The event is being held at the civic center in Birmingham)

After a lengthy discussion regarding the essentiality of baptism, I asked him if he would defend this statement, *All accountable individuals must be baptized in order to be saved.* He refused, and tried to use the thief on the cross as an example to prove his point! He then told me that a young girl (about 14 he said) came to him earlier this week and desired to become a Christian, but since her parents could not come that night, would it be OK to wait until Sunday. He then asked me, "Are you telling me that if that girl dies before Sunday, that she will be lost?" My reply: "I don't have to tell you that. Mark 16:16 already tells you that. Just because I want something to be true does not change the word of God." To which he replied, "I am not willing to go that far. Anyway, I have heard someone explain from the Greek that Mark 16:16 can be translated "because you're already saved." I pulled every modern translation I could get my hands on and told him I could not find a single one that so translated the text. He was not satisfied. (I suspect, in his confusion, he was referring to Acts 2:38 and the Baptist explanation of the phrase "for remission of sins"). He then said, "I just have a lot more faith in Jesus than in baptism." I replied, "How can you separate Jesus from what He taught. Jesus commanded baptism." At that point he said he was very busy and thanked me for calling. He offered to meet me in Hamilton to discuss this further. I told him there was no need, since I was going to stand by Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38 and 22:16, and Galatians 3:27 no matter if he is in Hamilton or Tuscaloosa, and that he could not disprove what they teach no matter how hard he tried.

We then concluded our conversation. I was satisfied I fully understood what he believes and he had no doubts about what I believe. I don't intend to pursue this any further, since I don't think anyone at University, at least in the leadership, cares about what God's Word has to say.

The only reason I presented this information to you is to **warn you about the University church in Tuscaloosa and any congregation that supports YIA.**
-- Seek the Old Paths – October, 1998

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