

Churches of Christ — Past & Present

by Bill Crews

My father began preaching almost 18 years before I was born, and preached for more than five decades. I have now been preaching for almost 70 years. This is said to let our readers know that I should know something about the churches of Christ, past and present, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in our nation. Let me tell you what nearly all churches of Christ used to be like.

Those who constituted these churches regarded themselves as and were striving to be just Christians, individuals saved from their past sins and made part of the spiritual body of Christ. The churches were congregations that belonged to Christ, thus churches of Christ.

They pleaded with other religious people to give up religious names that were chosen by men, doctrines that were devised by men, and churches that were founded by men. They knew that sectarianism or denominationalism was not of God and not pleasing to God. They knew that the Scriptures enjoin unity and condemn division. They were not seeking to be “another kind of Christians,” constituting yet another denomination.

They sought to speak where the Bible speaks and to be silent where the Bible is silent, and said so, and called upon others to do the same. They insisted upon calling Bible things by Bible names and upon doing Bible things in Bible ways, and asked others to do the same. If they were doing things not authorized by the Holy Scriptures, if they were failing to do things enjoined by the Scriptures, they wanted to know it.

They expected to be asked why they taught what they taught, did what they did, and refrained from doing what they refrained from doing. And they tried to give a “thus saith the Lord” or Scripture when they were asked why they did a particular thing or why they refrained from doing a particular thing. They also reserved the right to ask others the same questions and would settle for nothing less than a Bible answer. Their preachers were ready to defend their religious faith and practice and to discuss differences, publicly or privately, with anyone. They challenged teachers of error to public debates and never refused honorable discussion of differences. They believed that teachers of the truth had nothing to fear and that the truth would always stand out in open, honorable discussion.

But the success of rapid growth and new generations of members not grounded in New Testament truth and some who have wanted things to be otherwise have largely changed this picture for most churches of Christ. An old story is being acted out all over again. History is repeating itself. Today many churches of Christ are not concerned about respecting the authority of God’s Word in all things. Many unauthorized innovations have been introduced. Many members look upon the churches of Christ as constituting another denomination among denominations. Most preachers are completely uninterested in and fearful of discussions, public or private, of religious differences. They seem more interested in getting along, fitting in, attracting and holding numbers, friendly competition, and “dialogue.” Most will refuse a challenge to public debate, especially upon issues within churches of Christ. Desire for recognition, acclaim, acceptance strongly influence. Apostasy is the order of the day.

But there are still some churches of Christ that are concerned about being churches after the New Testament order. The church that meets on Roanridge Road is one of them.

EDITOR’S NOTE: I encourage studious Christians to read *The Search for the Ancient Order*, volumes 1 & 2, by Earl Irvin West to get a picture of what churches and Christians have done to attempt to restore New Testament Christianity in their places and times. Brother Crews’ article is timely and precise. Pray for those churches and brethren who have departed from the biblical order.

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