

Seek The Old Paths

"Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths...and walk therein."
(Jeremiah 6:16)

Vol. 16, No. 9

September 2005

THE CHURCH OUR LORD BUILT "WAS NOT" A DENOMINATION

Dan Goddard

The church of Christ is a unique religious institution. It is different from all other religious bodies on the face of the earth. One of the things from which it is different is protestant denominationalism. In making this declaration, someone immediately replies, "What do you mean, the church of Christ (they would mean a denomination) is different from protestant denominationalism? Isn't the church of Christ (again a denomination in thinking of a querist) a protestant denomination?"

I know this is the way a good many people view the church of Christ, even some who are members of it; but such is not the case. I, for one, have deliberately refused to join any denomination and have chosen instead to be just a Christian. Can't one be a Christian without joining a denomination? But if one becomes and remains a Christian only, is he a member of any church? And if so, whose? The answer is — Christ's church, and Christ's church is not a denomination.

When Christ said, "*Upon this rock I will build my church*" (Matt. 16:18), did he have in mind a denomination or a federation of denominations? And the "churches of Christ" about which we read in Romans 16:16, were they denominations? Were they not simply local congregations of people who had

become Christians only? If one could be just a Christian, a member of Christ's church in the first century before there were any denominations, why can't one be just a Christian, a member of Christ's church, today, in the twenty-first century without being a member of any denomination?

But, someone says, "I thought a man by the name of Alexander Campbell was the one who started the church of Christ." The truth is that Alexander Campbell was almost 1800 years too late to establish the church of Christ. Campbell was born September 12, 1788. But, as we have already noted, churches of Christ existed in the first century and the apostle Paul referred to them in Romans 16:16. Campbell obviously was not the founder of those churches of Christ. Yet the churches of Christ today are the same as the churches of Christ we read about in the Bible. The fact is that Alexander Campbell, along with a number of other men in various denominations, in the late 1700s and early 1800s, came to the conclusion that, in religion, we ought to abandon human names and human creeds, human traditions and human religious bodies, and return to the New Testament as our only authority in religion. Campbell himself withdrew from the denomination in which he had been reared and for which he had begun to

preach in order to be free of all human encumbrances and free to preach the Gospel as it is in the New Testament. The moving thought behind Campbell and a host of others was that we ought to speak where the Bible speaks and remain silent where the Bible is silent. He contended that we ought to be Christians only (without being affiliated with any denomination) and thus members of the one spiritual body of Christ, the church. With such as his guiding principle, Alexander Campbell did not seek to establish another denomination, a new religious body, but rather his aim was to go back over the dark dismal past of departure to the original church of Christ that we read of in the New Testament.

Perhaps an illustration from everyday life will help us to better see this particular point. Abner Doubleday is credited with having invented the game of baseball. Suppose that for the next one hundred years no one played baseball and the game was forgotten. Then a hundred years from now someone finds an old baseball guide book, lays off a playing field, puts two teams of players on the field, and starts playing baseball again. To observers at the time it might appear that a new game had been

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RED LETTER BIBLES

Douglas Hoff

Have you ever wondered why the words of Jesus are printed in red in many, but not all, Bibles? According to information found in my King James Version, the idea originated with Louis Klopsch in 1899.¹ Klopsch was the owner-editor of the Christian Herald magazine and was writing an editorial when his eyes fell upon Luke 22:20 which reads, *“This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.”* Klopsch reasoned that red words would suitably represent the words spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ. His preacher encouraged him to prepare such a Bible, and in November, 1901, the Christian Herald advertised red letter Bibles for sale.

The preacher, T. DeWitt Talmadge, said of this new edition that “it could do no harm, and it most certainly could do much good.” In preparation for this new Bible, scholars from America and Europe were asked to submit passages which they regarded as spoken by Christ while on earth. Later editions have all words spoken by Christ in red (e.g., Rev 22:16).

The short article in my Bible entitled History Of The Red Letter begins by stating: “The words in red in many Bibles are neither more or less important than the words in black. Jesus said to the seventy: ‘He that heareth you heareth me’ (Luke 10:16).”

This point is exactly right. The words spoken by Peter or Paul are just as much the word of God as those spoken by Jesus (II Tim. 3:16,17). The apostles were guided into all truth by the Holy Spirit (John 16:13,14). Through inspiration, the apostles spoke the words of Jesus when he was no longer on the earth.

It would be great if more people would acknowledge this simple fact today. However, there are some who consider only the words in red to be the words of Jesus. To them, the words of Paul are uninspired commentary on the words of Christ or perhaps the testimony of the early

church. Having had red letter Bibles for over 100 years now, the statement that “It could do no harm...” has been proven false.

What is even worse today is the rejection of the words of Christ by so-called scholars. In 1985, a panel of liberal theologians started having a series of meetings (called The Jesus Seminar) to determine the historicity of the New Testament. What is their conclusion? They charge that 82 percent of the teaching attributed to Christ in the four gospel accounts is not genuine.²

The participants in these meetings vote on the words of Christ and then assign it a color representing the degree of confidence one may put in it. For example, if the saying is undoubtedly genuine it is given the color red (wonder where they came up with that idea?). If it is probably genuine the color pink is used. Gray represents those words which Jesus probably did not utter, but the ideas are close to his. Black is reserved for the words which are definitely not Jesus’.

To these so-called scholars, anything miraculous (including predictive prophecy) is automatically given the black ink. Thus, according to them, Jesus certainly could not have predicted the fall of Jerusalem (Matt. 24:1-34).

Brethren, it is time to get back to a proper view and respect for the Bible. We need to prove to people why the word of God is true and that all of it is the word of Christ, not just the words in red!

ENDNOTES:

1 “History of the Red Letter Edition,” in The Holy Bible — King James Version, Reference Edition (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1972), no page number. The article appears on the page immediately before the Concordance. Stock number 575BG, no ISBN.

2 Wayne Jackson “The Jesus Seminar, 1,” Christian Courier, June, 1994.

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invented, but those willing to do a little research and go back in history a few years would realize that such was not the case. They would know that nothing new had been started, only that something old and previously known had been restored. Yet, that is precisely what happened in the religious world in the early 1800s. Men picked up God’s “guide book” (the Bible) and started working toward the restoration of the original church founded by Christ. These men were not seeking to establish another denomination, but rather were seeking to restore the very church that one reads of in the New Testament. It was a movement far more glorious and significant than even the Reformation Movement of the 1500-1600s.

Today, it is possible for one to hear of Christ (John 6:44-45; Rom. 10:17), believe on him as the Son of God (John 3:16; 8:42; Acts 8:37), repent of all sins (Luke 13:3,5; Acts 17:30), confess faith in Christ (Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:9-10), and be baptized in water for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Rom. 6:3-6,17-18; I Peter 3:21), just as people did in the first century (Acts 2,8,16,18,22). Such will make of one today the same thing it made of one then — simply a Christian, a member of Christ’s church. All today who do this in a particular geographical location make up the church of Christ in that location. If they remain true to New Testament teaching in doctrine, worship, practice, and daily life, they continue to be — even here in the complex twenty-first century — simply a church of Christ, but without being a denomination of any kind.

Indeed, the church of Christ is NOT a denomination!

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