

Today's Sermons

Morning: How Exclusive Are We?

Evening: TBA

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Times of Services:

Sunday
Bible Study:... 10:00am
AM Worship:...11:00am
PM Worship:...6:00pm

Wednesday
Bible Study:.....7:00pm

Radio Program
Sunday:.....7:30am
"Back to the Bible"
AM 580 WSKS
93.5 FM

**We Extend A
Warm &
Cordial
Welcome
To All Our
Visitors!**

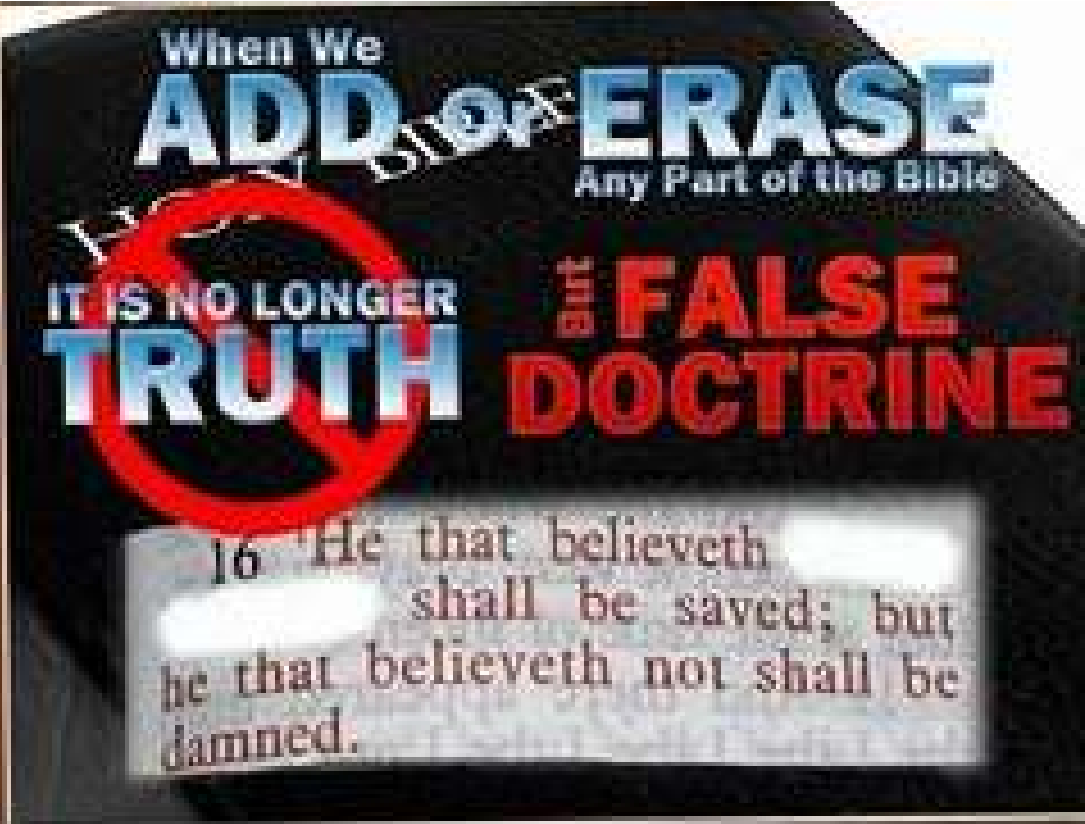
Why the Churches of Christ Were Right After All

Ted Campbell

My great grandfather and great grandmother Campbell were members of the Braxton Church of Christ in Cannon County, Tennessee, and after my great grandfather died and my great grandmother moved her three boys to Texas, she raised them in the South Park Church of Christ in Beaumont, Texas. My grandfather and one of his brothers married Methodist sisters and the women succeeded in diverting them into Methodist churches. The reputation that the Churches of Christ had among my kinfolk was that they were eccentric because they did not use musical instruments in worship, they celebrated the Lord's Supper every Sunday, they didn't have creeds (except the New Testament), and they seemed not to recognize other Christian churches who did not "bear the name" of Christ in the names of their (our) denominations.

This impression was solidified when in my senior year in high school I responded enthusiastically to an advertisement in a used-book shop in Beaumont promising free Greek lessons. I was taken to a small Church of Christ in Bridge City, Texas, where I got about forty-five minutes of instruction in the Greek alphabet and then I was treated to an hour and a half of heated discussion sparked by a question posed by a younger and obviously inexperienced minister, "If I go to a Baptist

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revival and I just sit on the back row and don't sing the hymns or anything, does that constitute having 'fellowship with unfruitful works of darkness'" (Ephesians 5:11)? The answer, I quickly learned, was yes, it does. And from the conversation in the car on the way to Bridge City and back I figured out that this was a group of Church of Christ folk who regarded a lot of other Churches of Christ folk as mere pretenders to the name. They were, I think, what my Campbell relatives called "hard-shell" Churches of Christ folk.

So I did not have a very positive impression of the Churches of Christ, but I'm beginning to change my mind, and now I'm thinking they may be right on some of those most interesting points that have distinguished them. I attended the Preston Road Church of Christ on Sunday March 6, 2011, deeply enjoyed the service, the singing, and the sermon by Rev. Scott Sager. I also was offered and received the Lord's Supper there, so my great grandma Campbell can perhaps take solace in the fact that I am now in communion with at least one Churches of Christ congregation however soft-shelled they may be and however unwittingly this happened on the part of the congregation. Here are five reasons why the Churches of Christ may be right after all.

First, they have **a profound insight into Christian music and its place in worship**. I'm not sure I buy the rationale that says that because the New Testament doesn't mention musical instruments, congregations should not be forced to sing with them. The Churches of Christ seem to use plenty of stuff – like collapsible music stands – that are not to my recollection mentioned in the Holy Scriptures. But they sure do sing well and, speaking as a man on this point, I really appreciate a church that does not expect me to sing soprano, even transposed an octave lower. There's something utterly wonderful about the sound of human voices blending together in harmony. I wonder if we have gone too far with our instrumental fetish in worship. First the instrumentalists just accompanied us, then they wanted to improvise on the last verse, forcing us all to sing soprano, and now they just seem to launch off into improvisation whenever they feel like it with no warning. Maybe we need to send out a message on our projection screens or with a flashing neon lights, "Everybody Sing Soprano Now" or "Altos, Tenors and Bases: Drop Off." I'm tired of it; I think I like the Church of Christ.

Second, they've sure got **the right name**. If you think about, I mean, think about it from the perspective of a friendly outsider, "Methodist" and "Presbyterian" and "Baptist" are not really ace names for Christian groups. Even "Catholic" sounds a little pretentious and "Orthodox" a little snitty. "Church of Christ" sounds pretty straightforward by contrast. And you don't find local Churches of Christ congregations named "Wellspring Cornerstone Kewl Informal Non-Stuff Community," just "Preston Road Church of Christ" or "Highway 59 Church of Christ." Like the New Testament, they just name their congregations for the places where they meet, kind of like the hobbits who built a new row of houses and then after a long discussion decided to name it "New Row." Perfectly straightforward. What's not to like about that?

Third, the Churches of Christ **celebrate the Lord's Supper every Sunday**. Churches of Christ folk haven't fallen for Protestants' quirky idea that words can suffice in place of bread and wine. The service at Preston Road was very simple, with an elder of the congregation offering a simple prayer of thanksgiving for the bread (which seemed to be matzot, the kind of unleavened bread that Jews eat during Passover) and a prayer of thanksgiving for the wine (which tasted a lot like grape juice), then the elements were distributed to the congregation in the pews. It reminded me a lot of the simple prayers over the bread and wine in the second-century Didache document; I wondered if the distinguished second-century scholar Everett Ferguson of Abilene Christian University had somehow influenced this congregation or its leaders.

Fourth, **there really is only one Church of Christ**. That's one of the cardinal claims of the ecumenical movement of the twentieth century, and the Churches of Christ were way out front in making us aware of that claim. You don't have to buy the "hard-shell" version of the Church of Christ teaching to own that basic truth.

Fifth, and perhaps most importantly, **the simplicity of the Churches of Christ allows them to focus on what is most important, namely, the Gospel of Jesus Christ**. There was no congregational creed beyond the songs we sang, of course, but a member of the congregation got up before the offering and exhorted us to consider the sacrifice of Christ as we give ourselves. He also mentioned that it was the 175th anniversary of the fall of the Alamo, which is pretty sacred for Texas folks and was aimed at driving home the importance of personal sacrifice though I worried that it came a little close to identifying Texan and Christian. But still, this man knew the faith and he presented the Gospel in a simple and straightforward manner. The pastor's sermon on the salt and light passage in the Sermon on the Mount (St. Matthew 5:13-16) drove home the message that Christians need to be giving themselves for the world. The salt, he said, needs to get out of the salt shaker.

I came away with the sense that Churches of Christ folk really are the hobbits of the Christian world: not a lot of technological razzmatazz, not a lot of heavy emotion, not an elaborate or sophisticated liturgy, they just get the job done. There is a primitive simplicity to their communities that really stands out among other church bodies trying to be the church of Christ. We'd do well to learn from them and thank God for their witness.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Feb. 1st – Men's Business Meeting & Ladies' Class
- Feb. 8th – Preach & Eat & 1:30 Song Service.
- Please give support money for Chinese orphans to Minnie Kennell