



ISSUE

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Faithful Sayings

BULLETIN OF
THE OL-
SEN PARK
CHURCH OF
CHRIST

Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM

10:00 AM

11:00 AM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Pat Ledbetter

Brady McAlister

Jeff Nunn

Deacons:

Ben Hight

Blake McAlister

Walker McNear

Sam Nunn

Lance Purcell

Justin Smiley

Kevin Wise

Trevor Yontz

Evangelist:

Kyle Pope

How Old Is the Church of Christ?

By Eugene W. Clevenger

From the *Preceptor* 1.12 (October 1952)

It is purely a falsehood that the Church of Christ now in our midst claiming to be the Church of the New Testament and claiming nearly two thousand years of history that this particular denomination knows nothing about. Here is the truth about the Church of Christ making this claim. The seventh and eighth grade history of Tennessee tells when and where the so-called Church of Christ was organized. It was started by Alexander Campbell about 1827-1880. Beyond this there is not one trace of such a denomination. Would you suppose that a great state like Tennessee would send its young people out into the world to be embarrassed by quoting history that is untrustworthy? *The Handbook of All Denominations* gives precisely the same information.

This is a quotation from the bulletin of a Baptist church relative to the origin of the church of Christ. The author of this statement makes the sad mistake of taking as authority in religious matters history books and other secular sources. He maintains that if a history book of Tennessee says something is true, then of necessity it must be true. In other words, scholars wrote these books, and scholars are always perfectly objective in their statements and never fallible. I know that history books written by scholarly men are supposed to be reliable, and usually are as long as they deal with historical facts, but when history scholars venture off into the realm of religion and spiritual matters, about nine times out of every ten they "miss the boat."

The New and the Old

The authors quoted in this Baptist church bulletin certainly missed it if they maintained that the church of Christ, the church of the New Testament, was started by Alexander Campbell around 1827 or 1830. But we can understand why even history scholars would take such a position relative to the origin of the church of Christ. About nine hundred ninety-nine people out of every thousand hold the erroneous view that the Roman Catholic Church is the oldest church, and that all of the Protestant denominations have sprung from her within the last three or four hundred years. Therefore, it is believed by the majority that all we have in the world today is human denominationalism.

That is the average concept, but simply because the masses of the people who have been reared in divisive denominationalism do not know the difference between denominational Christianity and New Testament Christianity, does not mean that there is nothing besides denominationalism in the world today. I can understand when even historians would think that the church of Christ be-

gan only about a century ago. Why? Because for thousands of years, during the great apostasy, the Dark Ages and even the years of the Protestant Reformation, the peoples of the world did not know what the New Testament church was.

The Bible had been kept from the masses so long, they had been shackled to fear and ignorance by the intolerant domination of the Roman Catholic Church, until the conception of the New Testament church that had existed in the days of the apostles had been completely obliterated from their minds and their thinking. Then when certain men came on the scene appealing to people to return to the New Testament pattern, to leave divisive denominational ties and be Christians and Christians only, this was such a strange doctrine that people thought it was something novel and new, and, therefore, heretical and unorthodox. Therefore, they thought these men were trying to start a new denomination, and thus they have identified the origin of the church of Christ with the efforts of these men. But they were not preaching something new, they were not starting a new church; they were simply pleading for a return to the New Testament and the New Testament church.

The truth was that what they were preaching was so old the people thought it was new. They were simply preaching the New Testament, which, in their time about a hundred years ago, was around 1800 years old, but religious people in their day were so bound by denominational creeds and dogmas, they regarded the simple preaching of the word of God as something new, strange, and unorthodox. Their minds were so fettered to the denominational setup of their day. they regarded the preaching of undenominational Christianity as something novel and weird. The teachings of these men in the early part of the nineteenth century dated back eighteen hundred years before them to the New Testament itself, and the principles they proclaimed were so old and unfamiliar, the masses regarded them as new and heretical. Historians have likewise been blinded to the real truths because of their similar denominational conceptions and viewpoints.

An Illustration

To illustrate the fact that something can be so old it is considered new, we go to the field of sports. Suppose for a moment that within the next few years, for some reason or another, football becomes

an obsolete sport. I do not think it will, but for the sake of illustrating the point, let us suppose that within ten years from now, nobody plays the game called football. Years roll by; decades pass; centuries roll on and still nobody plays football. Some other great sport has taken its place, and the people five hundred years from now are altogether unfamiliar with football. It has passed out of existence, and the great majority of even sport enthusiasts have never heard of football.

Bye and bye, someone by mere chance discovers a rule book showing how to play a game called “football,” and they find that the little booklet describing the game dates back to the remote year of 1952. They rightly conclude that five hundred years before their day, their forefathers played a game called “football,” and reading the booklet they decide perhaps they would like to play the same game. So, they read the rules and regulations, they prepare a field the exact size and get together all the necessary equipment. They get two teams with eleven men each on them, and then and there, five hundred years from now, they play football. It had not been played at all for five hundred years, yet those people can play it if they follow the rule book. No doubt, to those people the game would certainly seem new, novel, strange, and perhaps different from anything they had ever played, but the question is, *was it a new game or was it just new to them?*

You can readily see that the game itself is over five hundred years old, but because it had become obsolete, it seemed new. Writers of books may have written in their latest edition that the people of their day were playing a new game called “football”; it was novel, it was unlike any other game, it was great! But was it new? No! It only seemed new. Was it unlike any other game ever played? No! The game had been played long, long ago. So, it is with the Bible, God’s rule book, discovered after 1800 years among the rubbish of creeds, manuals, disciples, catechisms, and confessions of faith. God’s rule book told of a way of life that was lived eighteen hundred years ago by simple Christians in the early, apostolic church. But the rule book had been covered up in the debris of the apostate church with all of its corruptions

for century after century. The book had been hidden, and the people had thrived only on ignorance, superstition and fear.

When the book was rediscovered and the plea was made for people to return to the Bible and the way of life described therein, when God’s word was preached for the first time in centuries in its purity, simplicity and completeness, without the interpretation of councils, creed, and conventions, people cried, “It is something new! It is strange! It is weird! It is unorthodox! It is heresy!” It was not new—it only seemed new because it was so unfamiliar. It was not unorthodox, because it was the word of God in its purity and completeness—it only seemed so. The church these men were preaching was not a new church; it was not just another denomination; it was the church of the New Testament that had existed eighteen hundred years before their day, but it seemed like a new church because for so long the Catholic Church and later the Protestant denominations had held sway completely, and the church of the New Testament had been lost in the rubbish heap. No, even though it seemed like a new denomination was emerging when these men preached a

return to the New Testament way of life and the New Testament church, it was simply the old Jerusalem gospel so new to the people of the nineteenth century.

A history book written by a fallible man, even though he is honest in his views and tries to be objective in his thinking, is not the criterion by which we can determine the origin of the church of Jesus Christ.

A Similar Statement

Two or three years ago I was reading in a daily newspaper of a large city about the Roman Catholic Church, and she was excommunicating all members who were even leaning toward Communist ideals and who were reading Communist literature. In the Associated Press story, the following statement was made: "The excommunication order appeared to have no precedent in the 1900-year history of the Roman Catholic Church. It could affect millions of persons." Here is a newspaperman who writes about the

2000-year history of the Catholic Church, but I know that this apostate church does not have a 2000-year history. If it did, then it would date back to the New Testament church, but it is not the New Testament church, and, therefore, it is not as claimed the oldest church.

Someone wants to believe that such a report as that would not be printed unless it were true, because, they would argue, such a newspaper would not want its readers to be embarrassed by quoting a statement from it that is untrustworthy. But the statement is untrustworthy, and one would be greatly embarrassed if he tried to prove that this denomination has a 2000-year history. Which proves what? Simply that one cannot believe everything he reads in a book or newspaper. Some history book or some newspaper story is not an infallible criterion by which to judge anything, much less something that has to do with the religion of Jesus Christ. The same thing that is said with reference to the history book can be said about the book entitled, *The Handbook of All Denominations*.

It is not anything new for people to call the Lord's church just another denomination or sect, because even in Paul's day it was the sect everywhere spoken against (Acts 28:22). But even though it was called a sect then, that did not make it a sect, and even though people in the twentieth century continue to call it just a denomination, either out of ignorance or bitterness, it still does not make it what people call it. When denominational preachers see that denominationalism is sinful, and they cannot escape the fact they are in human denominations, they try to make people believe than even the Lord's church is but another denomination.

We are pleading for people to be Christians and Christians only. Sectarianism is sinful, and there is no need for it when men and women can be members of the Lord's church, the New Testament church.

