

ISSUE

18.8

BULLETIN OF  
THE OLSEN  
PARK CHURCH  
OF CHRIST

# Faithful Sayings

February 21,,  
2016

## Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM

10:00 AM

11:00 AM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

### Elders:

Pat Ledbetter

Jeff Nunn

Kyle Pope

### Deacons:

Steve Dixon

Ryan Ferguson

Arend Gressley

Ben Hight

Jack Langley

Blake McAlister

Brady McAlister

Walker McAnear

Sam Nunn

Lance Purcell

Rusty Scott

Justin Smiley

Trevor Yontz

### Evangelist:

Kyle Pope



## “Institutional” and “Non-Institutional” Churches

By Kyle Pope

Recently an e-mail was addressed to the church from India from a man asking about what he called the “Institutional Church of Christ” and the “Non-Institutional Church of Christ.” He wanted to know if there are two churches of Christ and “Which one is the right one?” His question illustrates the importance of exercising caution in the terminology we use as well as in the approaches we take to make certain all of our teachings and practices are biblically based. Below is my response to his question:

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

As the Bible uses the phrase **“churches of Christ”** (Rom. 16:16) it is not a formal name of the church Jesus built, but a way to which congregations that belong to Christ may be referred. Jesus established one church, which He **“purchased with His own blood”** (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 4:4; Acts 20:28). It is referred to in a number of different ways in Scripture, including the **“church of God”** (Acts 20:28); the **“church of the living God”** (1 Tim. 3:15); **“church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven”** (Heb. 12:23); **“the church of”** [whatever the name of the city may be] **“in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:”** (1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1);

**“churches of the saints”** (1 Cor. 11:16); and **“churches of”** [whatever the name of the region may be] **“which were in Christ.”** (Gal. 1:22). None of these are formal names, but different ways of identifying the one church that the Lord established or congregations of His people in different places.

When someone obeys the gospel the Lord adds him or her to His church universally (Acts 2:47). Those who are faithful to the Lord will identify with other faithful Christians in order to worship God and work together as a local church (Acts 11:25-26).

As we see from the Lord’s letters to the seven churches in Asia, not all local churches continue faithfully in following the word of God (Rev. 2-3). The Lord warned the church in Ephesus, **“I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent”** (Rev. 2:5). As human beings it is not our place to *remove a lampstand* (so to speak), but it is our place to judge to the best of our ability whether those with whom we are identified are walking in accordance with God’s word. The church in Thessalonica was commanded to **“withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us”** (2 Thess. 3:6). If a member of a sound church *walks disorderly* a local church must act to discipline that member by *withdrawing* from social contact with him or her. This is intended to cause the unfaithful member to feel shame that moves him or her to repentance (2 Thess. 3:14) and protect the rest of the congregation from the negative influence that member’s sin might have upon it (1 Cor. 5:6-8). If an entire church *walks disorderly* faithful Christians must leave that local church and seek out those who are faithfully serving the Lord. We see this from the example of Paul’s efforts to teach Jews in different cities first and then *withdrawing* with faithful disciples to worship separately when other Jews rejected the truth (Acts 19:9).

The terms “Institutional” and “Non-Institutional” are ways of identifying practices and beliefs adopted by local churches that have developed in the United States since the 1950s. At that time brethren slowly became divided over the question of whether there is scriptural authority for the church to take money from its collection and give money to support human *institutions* established for educational or charitable purposes. Those who could be referred to as “Institutional” argued that money could go to



Bible colleges or children's homes. Those who could be referred to as "Non-Institutional" argued that there is no example of the collection being used to support *any* human institution. In the years since then brethren holding these different views have withdrawn from one another and many other things are now also associated with the practices of those who are considered "Institutional." Some of these churches now put kitchens in their buildings, sponsor social and recreational activities as works of the church, practice sponsoring church arrangements to promote foreign evangelism, and no longer believe that apostolic examples are binding upon local churches today. These views reflect a more *liberal* view toward the authority of Scripture, resulting in the fact that sometimes these brethren are called "liberal." They may be conservative in many areas compared to the world, but more liberal in their view of scriptural authority. As a result, they usually don't like to be called "Liberals." Given that the majority of those in the United States who identify themselves with churches of Christ are "Institutional" they may sometimes be referred to as "Mainstream" in order to avoid the impression of offering an insult by speaking of their view as "Liberal."

Brethren who could be referred to as "Non-Institutional" find that the Bible authorizes the collection to be used for 1) Direct relief to needy saints (Acts 11:29)—not to a separate institution to distribute it; 2) Direct support of preachers (1 Cor. 9:14; Phil. 4:16)—not a separate institution or church to distribute it; 3) Support of elders who labor in the word (1 Tim. 5:17); and 4) Regular support of qualified widows (1 Tim. 5:3-16). In addition to this, they would also argue that it may be inferred that

if Scripture identifies tasks as works of the church—the church may use funds from the collection to support that work. For example, we are commanded to assemble, so the church may spend the funds necessary to provide a place to assemble (Heb. 10:25). They would also argue that there is no example of the collection being used to provide general benevolence to non-Christians—it is called the "**collection for the saints**" (1 Cor. 16:1). Help to non-Christians is the responsibility of individuals *as they have opportunity* (Gal. 6:10)—it is not the work of the church. Given that this is a more *conservative* view of the authority of Scripture, those who hold this view are often referred to as "Conservative." Among "Institutional" brethren who often scoffed at their opposition to the support of institutions they were sometimes called "Antis"—a name they preferred not to be called. So, in general referring to these different positions as



“Institutional” or “Non-Institutional” seem to be ways of referring to these differences in a manner that is not considered insulting, but which articulates the differences.

I personally believe that a “Non-Institutional” position matches the teaching and pattern of the Bible much more closely, but I do not believe that it should be used as a *badge* or identifying label for Christians individually or for the church collectively. I am

a “Christian”—not a “*Non-Institutional* Christian.” I work and worship with a congregation that strives to be simply a church which belongs to Christ—not a “*Non-Institutional* church which belongs to Christ.” If we use terms this way we come very close to what denominations do in speaking of “Baptist” churches or “Methodist” churches. What we must do is follow the word of God in all of our teachings and practices. As good stewards we must never bind where God has not bound, nor grant approval for that which God has not given His approval. God has not established two churches, but it is our responsibility to call all people to unity in doctrine and practice (1 Cor. 1:10). When brethren go beyond the authority of God’s word, unfortunately we must at times *withdraw* from such practices. God is the final judge of all things. All we can do is follow His word to the best of our understanding. It is always considered sin to do that which we cannot do in a good conscience (Rom. 14:22-23). When we differ with one another we must do our best to act in love toward one another and call each other to greater obedience to the word of God and unity in teaching and practice. I hope this clarifies how and why these terms are used.



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## Welcome Visitors

**We are so glad that you joined us today.  
Please come again.**

● **Let us know if you have any questions.**