

Schedule of Meeting Times:

WKAC 1080 AM Sunday 7:30 AM

Speaker, Robert Emerson

Study Sunday 10:00 AM

Worship Sunday 11:00 AM

Worship Sunday 5:00 PM

Singing every 2nd Sunday evening

Study Wednesday 7:00 PM

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We would love to
study God's word
with you!

**Servants during February:****Songleader:** Stanley (3); Larry (10); David (17), Chandler (24), Dwight (3/3),**Reading:** Stanley**Announcements:** Marty**Communion:** Mike, Lakin, Robert, Chandler**Wednesday Lesson:** Larry (6), Stanley (13),

Kris (20), Mike (27)

Lawn Mowing (week starting):

On winter vacation...

Singing: TBD (24)**Area Meetings:** Eastside (Singing

13-17); Market Street (Singing

22); Jackson Drive (Mondays

3/11-5/13)

Hays Mill church of Christ

21705 Hays Mill Road

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The Bible . Examiner

"Examine everything carefully..." –1 Thessalonians 5:21 NASB

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Why I Left Institutionalism (Part 2)

By Terence Sheridan

As a young man having recently taken a position as a university librarian in Montgomery, the author's only experience with Christianity was among churches of Christ—but he had become disgusted because it seemed to him that for most brethren, Christianity was merely social.

Then one day, an insurance sales representative came on business, but in the conversation, invited him to mid-week Bible study—and he met the Perry Hill Road brethren for the first time.

They were very friendly, committed to spiritual matters... and had convictions about "institutionalism." He had been warned about those "mean old antis..."

The Issue

At work, I had access to some books written by Christians. I would pick up hardcopies of debates between such preachers as Roy Cogdill and Guy

N. Woods, flip through the pages, and look at the arcane diagrams with arrows and boxes flying all over place. I would think to myself, "What is the big deal?!" Finally I told one of my elders that I intended to study the "institutionalism" issue. He gave me an out-of-print book and a notebook of debate charts by A.C. Grider.

As I looked over these materials, I began to understand what "the big deal" was. This was after the local preacher talked to me one day about determining Bible authority for whatever Christians do. I read with interest about the religious inconsistencies among those pushing for projects like "sponsoring churches," church-supported orphan's homes and colleges, etc. I read how people with non-institutional convictions were intimidated, threatened, kicked out of the church building, etc. I read about

how the church is a divine institution that stands alone and sufficient to do that which Christ assigned to it. It must be noted that some of the material I read was a bit vitriolic in tone, which is lamentable. Nonetheless, my view of the “mean old antis” started to change.

Ultimately, the books were not enough. It’s one thing to tell someone to read something like Roy Cogdill’s “Walking by Faith,” it’s quite another to be prepared to defend one’s own beliefs, 2 Tim 2:15. If I was to change my mind on any doctrinal matter, then it would have to be done with God’s inspired word. Furthermore, I couldn’t just be handed a bunch of pat, canned interpretations; I would have to be convinced with a credible, straightforward exegesis of the Bible. Over time, and through my own study, I found these things to be true:

1. Besides the universal church (Mt 16:17-19; 1 Cor 12:12-27), there were local congregations in the first century, Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 14:33.

2. None of the congregations mentioned in the Bible, however, tried to dictate to others what to do with their resources. No governing body had oversight over a group of churches; rather, elders exercised authority in autonomous congregations, Acts 14:26; 1 Pet 5:1-3.

3. There were limits on what Christians and congregations could do for others, 2 Thess 3:10; 1 Tim 5:16.

4. There was a distinction made between individual Christians and congregations of Christians, 1 Tim 5:16. This distinction included expectations that God had of both parties.

Congregational responsibilities were clearly designated as such. Other activities, such as aiding non-saints, were assigned to individual Christians in general (e.g., Eph 4:28; Gal 6:10; Jas 1:27).

5. The church never had a non-church organization carry out its duties. There were no missionary societies, seminaries, or charitable organizations overseeing finances for benevolence, evangelism, etc. If the New Testament Church could do what God asked of it, then why not now? Or do we think what God has given us is insufficient, 2 Peter 1:3?

6. There is a consistent and authoritative pattern in the New Testament governing the use and distribution of congregational resources, 2 Tim 1:13; 1 Cor 11:1,2; 16:1. In a nutshell, churches in the Bible did as God specified: supported evangelism, Phil 4:15-18; 1 Cor 9:7-14; spiritual edification, 1 Cor 14:26; and benevolence for the saints, 1 Cor 16:1-3; 1 Tim 5:16. No more, no less, 1 Cor 4:6. Should we not do the same?

What’s the personal application for me? Well, I’ve been around people who say you can’t have a piano playing in the church auditorium on Sunday morning because the Bible says we are to sing. They assert that the Bible teaches by command, approved apostolic example of actions in the New Testament, and things necessarily inferred by logic. Given what I know, I thus suppose I should try to be consistent about what I believe. I’ve come to the point where I don’t think I’ll ever be a member of a

church that embraces institutionalism. Someone may ask, “Isn’t that hair-splitting?” Granted, I know a lot of good Christians who disagree with my views on what a congregation of Christians can or cannot do; often, they put me to shame by the exemplary lives they lead. Their churches may be sincere about Bible authority and at times may be more Christ-like than some supposed “sound non-institutional” churches.


That said, I can only view the megachurch phenomenon as being the logical end of institutional practices. When a church decides to melt into the social fabric of the surrounding society by focusing on social issues (civic charity, recreation, politics, secular education, etc.), it becomes no more than a civic club paying lip-service to Jesus. Institutionalism is a spiritual distraction which opens the door for spiritual decay; I have personally witnessed this time after time. When Bible authority is overlooked in one area, other areas soon follow. That is why, in many churches, the teaching seems to be more humanistic than godly.

My heart goes out to those in institutional churches who are trying to serve lord the best they know how. Still,

Remember in Prayer

Becky, is doing better; but Shane’s father, Mickey Bates, faces serious continuing kidney and heart issues—surgery is planned this week to allow dialysis at home. Please continue to pray for them.

when something affects a corporate activity such as worship and when Christians have conscientious objections about what the Bible says, then there will always be more than one church in town (to put it politely). A unity that is based on an unscriptural concept is one I cannot endorse, especially when that unity involves a violation of church autonomy. True, as a human being susceptible to error and sin, I do not claim to have perfect knowledge of the Bible. Maybe I am mistaken about some things, but the question remains: what in good conscience can I do as a Christian, given what I perceive the Bible teaches? That, ultimately, is the question that every Christian must decide for himself on this side of eternity, Rom 14:26; Phil 2:12,13; Jas 4:17; 2 Cor 5:10.

I would like to make two final points: first, I was first attracted to my congregation by the godly conduct demonstrated and friendship freely given by other Christians. Later, I accepted their teachings on institutionalism. We can all learn something from this, considering what John 13:34,35 says. Second, you never know what those insurance salesmen will pull on you! 

Also, let’s not forget those in nursing homes, such as Madelene Britnell; and others that would like to, but cannot meet with us, like Lois Adams, Ruth Black, Carolyn Dennis, Tim and Dot Hice, Polly McNatt, and Hazel Teeples. 