

The BEACON

Published by the Newton church of Christ
Meeting at: St. James Church Rd and Glendale Ave



Vol. 22, No. 8

Edited by John Cripps

August, 2008

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?

By Hiram O. Hutto

Have you heard about the group of Christians in your community that is not at all like the denominations so often encountered? This group, known as the church of Christ, is different in a number of ways. Space permits us to consider only a few of them, and those but briefly.

1. **DIFFERENT**, in attitude toward the Bible. These Christians believe the Bible to be the inspired, infallible, complete, authoritative word of God, and that the New Testament is the final expression of that word. This faith is based upon such scriptures as **2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:3-4, 21; Rev. 22: 18-19; John 10:35**. But, do not all Protestant denominations believe this? There was a time when they did, but now many of them will tell you unhesitatingly that they no longer do. Even those denominations which are known as "Fundamentalists" are guilty of dividing the commandments of Christ into "essential;" and "non-essential" commands. This, in effect, nullifies the authority of the scriptures because it will let every man decide for himself what is essential and what is not. But not these Christians! They believe that man shall live "by every word that

proceedeth out of the mouth of God. " (**Matthew 4:4**.) Is this what you believe?

2. **DIFFERENT**, in attitude toward how to become a Christian. Since their faith in the scriptures is such that it will not allow them to divide the commandments of Christ into essential and non-essential commands, this group of Christians insists that because every man has sinned and separated himself from God (**Rom. 3:23; Isaiah 59:1-2**), man's only hope of benefitting from the blood of Christ is to do all that Christ has commanded men to do in order to reap these benefits. This, of course, involves faith in Christ as the Son of God (**John 20:30-31; Mark 16:16**.) But since the scripture says that our faith avails only when it works by love (**Galatians 5:6; James 2:24**), they also repented of their sins (**Acts 17:30**), confessed with their mouth what they believed in their heart (**Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:10**), and gladly obeyed the command of Christ to be baptized, i. e., immersed (**Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2: 12**) in water (**Acts 8:36**) for the remission of their sins (**Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16**), or to be saved. (**Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21**.) When one has done all these things—and not until

then—the Bible reveals that he is saved, a child of God by faith (**Gal. 3:27**), and a member of the Lord's church. (Cf. **Acts 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:1-2**.) Is this what you did?

3. **DIFFERENT**, in insisting on being simply a Christian—nothing more, nothing less, and nothing else. Every religious group teaches that a person can believe all the truth, obey every command of God, be a Christian while he lives, and go to heaven when he dies without ever belonging to any denomination whatsoever. Since this is true, this group of Christians sees the unimportance of every denomination and hence have not joined any denomination and are not a part of any denomination, but are simply Christians — nothing more, nothing less, and nothing else? Furthermore, since the Bible reveals that it is wrong and sinful to divide the people of God into different categories and be called by different religious names (**1 Cor. 1:10-13**), this group is satisfied with the name given in the New Testament, i. e., the name Christian (**Acts 11:26; Acts 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16**), and pleads for all believers to be one even as Christ prayed. (**John 17:20-21**.) They are satisfied to be simply members of the Lord's church and just Christians. Can this be dangerous? Can it be anything but safe? Is that what you are; or are you a "Christian plus another name"?

4. **DIFFERENT**, in attitude toward church worship and work. Since the New Testament commands Christians to assemble together (**Hebrews 10:25**), these do so; but such does not make them a denomination in any sense of the word. Such is simply the congregation

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of the Lord's people, the congregation devoted to and belonging to the Lord, or the church that belongs to the Lord, hence, the church of Christ or church of God. (**Acts 20:28; Romans 16:16.**) Since these Christians have the confidence in the scriptures already mentioned, they accept the New Testament as the divine, verbally inspired and authoritative blueprint for the church throughout all ages. Whatever acts this blueprint reveals that Christians did when they thus assembled is the pattern for them, and to it they cling tenaciously. Since the New Testament reveals that Christians are to assemble on the first day of the week to break bread, or eat the Lord's supper, give of their money, sing, teach the apostles' doctrine, and pray together (**Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-3; Acts 2: 42; Eph. 5:19**); that is exactly what this group of Christians does. Since the Bible forbids adding anything to what is revealed (**Rev. 22:18-19**), these Christians do not do anything else in church worship. Is this unreasonable? Can it be anything but right? Is this what you do? The New Testament also tells that the church is to preach the gospel, edify itself, and care for its needy. (**1 Tim. 3:15; Eph. 4:16; Acts 6:1-6.**) This group is glad to do just that.

5. **DIFFERENT**, because it has no ecclesiastical or denominational hierarchy. Since this group accepts the New Testament as its blueprint for the church, it is happy to follow the pattern therein given for church organization. The New Testament reveals no ecclesiastical authority higher than the local congregation, except Christ, the head of the

church. (**Eph. 1:22-23.**) The local congregation is to be overseen by elders (**Acts 14:23; Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1-3**) with deacons to serve (**Philippians 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8-10**) and is not governed by any conference, association, synod, pope, or council, but is simply free under God to do the will of Christ. It has no denominational machinery or earthly headquarters but is a free, independent, and autonomous body of Christians. Is the church of which you are a member like this?

This group occupies a unique and enviable position, indeed! It is a position based upon and produced by the infallible word of God. This group does not occupy this position merely as their opinion but because the word of God tells them and all others to do so.

THE BASIS FOR RELIGIOUS UNITY by **W. A. Moody**

If we all speak the same thing, then we will dwell together in unity. But where are we going to get all this "same thing" to speak? There is your problem. We can not find any unity among the creed books of today's religious organizations, for there is not a creed book among all those written by men that is acceptable as a basis for unity. We know that one denomination will not accept the manuals or disciplines of other denominations as authority for their religious practices. There is one book, however, that records God's Word, which is recognized by all as rightly constituted authority. All religious groups will agree that it is right and can not be wrong. That book is the Bible. Let

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us teach what the Bible says, no more and no less, and we will all speak the same thing, according to that exhortation in **1 Cor. I:10**: "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." If religious people would but speak where the Bible speaks and remain silent where it is silent, there would be no divisions among them. There would be unity.

NOTES FROM THE EDITOR

In **Hebrews 11:4(b)** the latter part of the verse, the writer states, "and through it he being dead still speaks." This is a sobering verse to ponder since it affirms the very existence of influence even after one has passed from this life. When we as Christians recognize that we must be good examples in this life, we clearly understand that the effects are ongoing. The father is told in **Eph 6:4** to raise his children in "the nurture and admonition of the Lord." A clear example of the failure to do this is seen in **Judges 2:10** - when we read that a generation arose that did not know God nor the work that He had done for Israel. The children of Israel were destroyed because of the "lack of knowledge" - **Hosea 4:6**. As parents and Christians we must display a keen interest in the worship of God; in the study of His word; and in our commitment to God in prayer. As we engage in this daily activities we will influence our children for generations to come, each been influenced by the examples of a faithful life in Christ. Let us commit ourselves to being the examples to others that we with confidence can say like Paul - "Imitate me as I imitate Christ"

