

Love It or Leave It

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It is difficult to keep one's thinking truly undenominational. Proud, carnal attitudes constantly make their way into spiritual affairs. The sources of jealousy and strife today are the same carnal attitudes that plagued the Corinthian church. (1 Cor. 3:1-5)

I think few people have complained more about the mental and spiritual shortcomings of modern churches of Christ that I have. I intend to continue to do just that. We must guard against party factions, against denominational conceptualizations, against becoming simply another sect. The concept of undenominational Christianity must be treasured by us and taught to the world. But

But I am troubled. Sometimes I am troubled when I hear others criticize (or admonish) because I wonder if our motives are the same and I wonder if our solutions are the same. I reprove my brethren because I love them, not because I find them unattractive. I am concerned about the inadequacies in churches of Christ because I consider them to be precisely that — churches of Christ, the hope of the world.

It seems to me that many of the young critics of the church today proceed on an entirely different set of assumption. Their criticisms do not reflect an intrinsic love and respect for simple faith but rather a personal revulsion against simplicity of faith and against simple people. Their call for a deeper individual commitment to godliness, comes off sounding like a rejection of literal obedience and the acceptance of authority. I feel I am being faced again with the ancient liberal choice of being either right or righteous.

In short, I sometimes hear young men saying the same things that I think need saying — but our thoughts lead us to act in different ways. I like simple plain preaching done by a corn-fed Alabama preacher (even at the risk of a passage being taken out of context). They like the evangelical scholars (few having attained the elevated intellectual status of appreciating sophisticated liberal scholarship) and yearn for their fellowship. I like conservative churches, even though some in them are contentious, and some do not understand undenominational Christianity (by the way, I think that most do). They find the spirit much sweeter in liberal churches, even in denominational churches, though they often are less than frank in saying so. (And is it possible to imagine that one would find an understanding of undenominational religion here). The difference between us are profound in act if not in word. I believe their actions reflect serious misunderstandings about the nature of the church of the Lord, about the quality of those who hold that faith today, and about the quality of religion in the sectarian world.

One final point. Be honest. I have no respect for a man who hides his convictions behind rhetoric. If one believes that the churches of Christ in this country are the Lord's people in our time, fighting his battles, being faithful to his patterns, then let's try to build

up the cause and expand the borders of the kingdom. If one believes that the "conservative churches of Christ" are an unenlightened, often bigoted, partially correct, contentious wing of the "Christian world" that one happens to be trapped in because of family or traditional loyalties, then let's get that understanding up front. I can appreciate most any one's work in the kingdom (even if it seems unenlightened to me) if I can see that he loves it. When one's affections turn to other places, then it is time to leave. - Vanguard, Nov, 1977