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Talks From The Bible: The Undenominational Church

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Recommended Citation

Cobb, Charles E., "Talks From The Bible: The Undenominational Church" (1950). *Stone-Campbell Books*. 475.
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TALKS
FROM
THE

Bible



THE
UNDENOMINATIONAL
CHURCH

A Prayer

Our Father,

Bless these words, we pray,

To the honor and glory of Thy Name,

And to the salvation of the souls of men.

In Jesus' Name,

Amen.

The Undenominational Church

All responsible people should be interested in a study of the church. In such a study it will be quickly discerned that the church set forth in the New Covenant is not a denomination.

An unprejudiced investigation of New Testament teaching concerning the church will remove from our minds doubts and fears which otherwise we might entertain. It will destroy the misleading concepts that men have sought to continually press upon us. It will enlighten and lead us along the road of salvation in which each of us is most surely interested. It will provide a stimulus toward greater understanding and appreciation of that which the impartial God of heaven has done for us. Therefore, we bid you to consider thoughtfully, earnestly, carefully this effort to present the undenominational church of our Lord.

Today, there is a long, dark shadow across the face of our land. The shadow is cast by fear. There is fear of atomic war. There

is fear of communism. There is fear of violent uprisings and uncontrolled demonstrations that disrupt the peace and tranquility of quiet neighborhoods. Yet, these fears, as pungent as they may be, and as close to the hearts of the American people as they are, are not comparable to the rational fear that should strike across the hearts of men and women who have embraced that which is unauthorized in the word of God. Many are the people who are giving themselves in dedicated service to that which the Bible in no wise counsels, provides, or authorizes. We urge each person who is willing to study the engrossing subject now before us to keep in mind that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Psalm 111:10).

Not Founded by Men

When we speak of the undenominational church of the Bible, we are speaking of that glorious institution that **WAS NOT—AND DOES NOT CLAIM TO HAVE BEEN FOUNDED BY MEN.** We are speaking of that sacred and divine institution that

was built by Jesus Christ, of which institution Jesus said, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it." When we speak of the undenominational church of the Bible, we do not speak of some institution that has been erected in honor of a great religious reformer, but we speak of that glorious body of people for which our Savior died. We would not take away any of the credit that belongs to those men who, centuries ago though bound by the shackles of the apostasy, endeavored to reform the existing religions of their day. We do not take from them any honor of which they are due. But, at the same time, we must not take from the Christ the honor that is due Him. When Jesus forcefully announced to His disciples, "Upon this rock, I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it," once and for all He set forth the fact that no other way would be provided by the living God than the way that He announced on that occasion. "I will build my church . . ." the undenominational church, the church of the Bible, the church set forth in the Bible, is the church that was built by Christ.

No Human Head

Secondly, when we talk about the undenominational church, we are not talking about some religious institution that recognizes human heads. Whenever a religious institution recognizes human heads *then that institution* by such action openly admits that it is not the church found upon the pages of the New Testament. When the New Testament reveals in the words of Christ Himself, "All authority hath been given unto me both in heaven and in earth," it removes any idea that Jesus Christ would ever set up a human head to rule and reign over the church for which He died. Jesus Christ is now reigning over His dominion and heading that blood-bought institution which the New Testament sets forth as "the church." The church revealed in the Bible, directed in all its work and worship by the New Covenant, does not recognize any human head. We are not bound in any way to bow the knee or submit in practice to the ideas or theories that may be pronounced and promulgated by SOME MAN who has been elevated (though a mere human being) to head some

religious institution. We believe that Jesus Christ is the head of the church. We believe it, because the Bible teaches it. In Colossians 1:18, the writer says, "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence." In Ephesians 1:22, 23 we are told again that the Lord Jesus Christ is the head of the church. "And hath put all things under his feet and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." *Our faith must come by hearing the word of God.* (Rom. 10:17.)

No Human Creeds

Not only do we recognize that Jesus Christ is the founder of the church and the head of the church, but the undenominational church revealed in the Bible is not in any sense bound by human creeds. What do we mean when we use the expression "human creeds"? The word "creed," indicates a statement of belief. When a man says, "This is my creed," he is saying in effect,

"This is what I believe." A *human creed* would be a *statement of belief based upon human concepts or opinions*. The church does not need any human authority or human source for its faith and practice. To the Christ and His word and **THAT ALONE** are we bound in religious faith and practice!

Sometime ago, headlines were made all across our nation by the announcement of a certain religious leader that on par with the word of God and on equal basis with the Bible, stand the traditions of men. The Lord condemned, "Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition" (Mark 7:13). When men are bound by tradition, they are bound to unauthorized and divisive doctrines and practices. The church that is set forth in the New Covenant is not bound by any human creed. Note these few passages to impress upon your mind the truth and solemnity of this fact. In Matthew 24:35, Jesus, our Savior, made this statement, "Heaven and earth shall pass away but my words shall not pass away." In John 12:48, our Savior said, "The words that I speak unto you, the same shall judge you in the last day." To impress

upon the mind of a young preacher of the gospel his responsibility of holding fast to the counsel of God, Paul wrote, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Tim. 3:16, 17.) From the inspired apostle Peter, we read, "God has given unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness." (2 Peter 1:3.) The apostle Peter also affirmed, "The word of the Lord endureth forever." (1 Peter 1:25.) What does God seek to impress upon our minds by these statements? That we are to recognize the Word of God! We are to look upon the word of God as the FINAL COURT OF APPEAL in religious matters. We are not to be bound by or submit to any human creeds, but rather to that which is set forth in God's word. The apostle Peter commanded, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts; and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you." (1 Peter 3:15.)

Why should one believe thus and so in religion? Because the Bible says it! Not because some council convened and authorized it, not because some synod thought that it would be a good doctrine, but because the Bible teaches it. *Believe it because the Bible teaches it! Believe it because it is in the Word of God!* Is there anything wrong with that?

No Human Name

The undenominational church does not labor under human names. When we seek to know the *name of the church* we turn to the New Testament and there find terms or names by which the Lord has referred to His people. Oftentimes, in the New Testament we read, "the church." On one occasion in the New Testament, we read "the churches of Christ" (Rom. 16:16). In First Corinthians, the twelfth chapter, we read, "the body of Christ;" in First Corinthians 1:2, "the church of God." In First Timothy 3:15, "the church of the living God." All of these terms and others we find in the

New Testament. We are to live and to labor under these terms or names as set forth in the New Testament. The question sometimes arises, "Why do you who are members of the church of Christ generally refer to the church as the "church of Christ"? Because in so doing we are doing that which the word of the Lord authorizes. In referring to the church as the church of Christ, we are practicing the principle found in Colossians 1:18, that teaches us that Jesus Christ is to be pre-eminent. When we refer to the church as the church of Christ, it is to Christ that pre-eminence is given.

It is absolutely scriptural to recognize the church by the name "the church of God." It is also scriptural to recognize the church simply as "the church." But mind you, it is possible for a religious people to take a SCRIPTURAL NAME and PROFANE the practice. When we wear a scriptural name, we should endeavor in every point and principle to be scriptural in practice. We cannot take a scriptural name and stand upon that alone—while practicing whatever we please regardless of New Testament teach-

ing, and truly be the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. We must not only take the name, wear the name, and be "proud "of the name, we must also preach and practice that which the New Testament teaches.

Human names create prejudice, bring about misunderstanding, and deny the counsel and wisdom of God. We are to be known as Christians. In Acts, the eleventh chapter, we are told that the disciples were "called Christians first in Antioch." In First Peter 4:16, the apostle wrote, "Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf." In the love of God, and for the sake of righteousness, why would it not be well for those who truly seek to serve the Lord to be known simply as Christians? Because of the wearing of human names, because men today are devoted to human creeds, because men want human heads, because men freely admit that the religious institutions of which they are members were founded by men, we do not have unity and peace in the religious world.

Our Savior prayed for the unity of believers, "That they may all be one; as thou Father art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us." (John 17:21.) The present-day divisions within the religious world surely must be a disappointment to our Lord. Such divisions exist as a mockery of our Savior's cherished hope and earnest prayer. Let us be reminded, and determined never to forget, "Except the Lord build the house they labour in vain that build it." (Psalm 127:1.)

Our Plea

In conclusion, may I point out to you that the apostle John by inspiration said, "Who-soever goeth onward and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God." (2 John 9.) The doctrine of Christ *DOES NOT* recognize human foundations, human creeds, human names, but the doctrine of Christ does uphold the founding power of Jesus, the headship, and lordship of the Christ, and the "sweetest name on mortal tongue."

We plead with you to turn away from that which divides and destroys. Accept the Lord's will and way. Stand together with God and his people. In this way there can

be no doubt. In this way there is no fear—
for where there is no doubt, there is no fear.
Obey God! He will add you to his church.
(Acts 2:47.) You then will be a member of
the *undenominational church* of which you
can read in the New Testament of Jesus
Christ.

NOTE

The lesson contained in this booklet was first presented as a series on the radio program, "Talks From the Bible." This program is heard Monday through Friday over Station WHIN, Gallatin, Tennessee, from 6:50 to 7:00 A.M.

The speaker on the program is Charles E. Cobb, minister of the South Water Avenue Church of Christ, Gallatin, Tennessee.

Additional copies of this booklet may be ordered from:

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P. O. Box 36
Gallatin, Tennessee 37066

\$6.00 per hundred
\$50.00 per thousand
(All Prices Plus Postage)

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