**Why are we different (part 1)?**

***\*FYI – Why are we different (part 2) will answer the question, “What do we do and practice?”***

One of your brethren here asked if I would preach a sermon on this topic. Recently I have seen many former members of the Oak Ridge church of Christ. This can be a wonderful reunion. Sometimes it can also be very sobering; a reminder of how easy it is for any of us to fall away. It has been striking to me to see many former members who are now part of denominations or with churches of Christ that practice things we do not see authorized or acceptable to the New Testament (NT). Just because a congregation calls themselves a “church of Christ” or claim to be following Christ, does not mean they are pleasing to the Lord. What we want to study this morning is, **Why Are We Different?** This study is not complicated or rocket science, but very important to understand from God’s word.

**1. THE THINKING OF SOME**

* Many churches feel that whatever an individual can do, a church can do (**e.g., James 1:25-27**). They fail to realize that James is writing to individual Christians and not to congregations (**James 1:1-2**).
* Many churches feel if a church thinks something is a good work, God will allow them to do it, no matter if they see authority from the scriptures or not. “Rock concerts in the building as long as folks would come.” We see that God defines what a good and acceptable work is (**Matthew 7:21-24, Ephesians 2:8-10**).
* Many churches make it clear that their primary mission is to provide social services to the community. You can see this with a casual scan of church websites in our area. Jesus’ mission on earth was to glorify God and His word and to seek and save the lost. That is the same mission He gave His church. We are to worship God, to save souls and help them on their spiritual journey to Heaven, and to encourage one another (**John 4:24, 17:17, Matthew 16:26-27, 18:11, 28:18-20, Acts 2:40-42, Romans 1:16, 15:5-6, Ephesians 1:13, 3:8-12, 4:11-16, 1 Timothy 2:3-4, 3:15**). These are just a few verses that highlight our primary missions.

**2. WHY DON’T WE …**

* **Why don’t we have church sponsored dances, pool parties, concerts etc.?** These are not authorized uses of the Lord’s treasury and some of these activities can stir up an environment of temptation due to immodest dress and immodest behavior [**Song of Solomon 2:7 (4 times), 1 Peter 4:1-4]**.
* **Why don’t we have church sponsored carnivals, raffles, selling and buying of chances, etc.?** Not an authorized use of how the church is to raise money and this activity promotes a form of gambling (**1 Corinthians 16:1-2, 1 Timothy 6:6-10**).
* **Why don’t we have church sponsored entertainment such as groups, choirs, bands, or soloists to give concerts during our services or use instruments in our praise of God?** The Lord has specified for all of his disciples to sing in order to praise and worship God and to teach one another in song. Nowhere in the NT do we see where churches provided entertainment for one another or use instruments with their singing (**Ephesians 5:18-21, Colossians 3:16-17).**
* **Why don’t we have a church sponsored daycare facility, bake sales, food pantries, flea markets, trunk or treat, easter egg hunts, Wednesday night spaghetti suppers, blood drives, clothing drives, fellowship halls, social centers, gymnasiums, etc.?** These are not NT authorized works/activities of the local church, not a function of the local church, and change the focus of the church (**Mark 11:15-17**). The NT church is to have a spiritual focus and provide spiritual nourishment. Christ Himself did not come to take away poverty in the world and this is not a mission of His church. His NT churches do provide for the physical needs of members of those churches, but do not provide for physical needs/physical activities for communities (**John 6:26-27, 21:15-17, Mark 14:3-7, Acts 2:44-45, 4:35-38, Ro. 14:16-19, 1 Tim. 5:16, 1 Cor. 11:20-22**).
* **Why don’t we, the Oak Ridge church of Christ, support man-made organizations?** Many churches feel if a man-made organization such as a school, a hospital, an orphanage, a ministry, etc., is a good work, then why not support these man-made organizations with the money collected for the Lord? In Oak Ridge we do not use money from the Lord’s treasury to support schools such as Abilene Christian College, David Lipscomb, Freed Hardeman, the Southeast Institute of Biblical Studies of the Karns church of Christ, Knoxville Christian Academy, or hospitals, orphanages, retirement homes, etc.? In the NT we find the local church is sufficient to provide for the needs of the local saints, provide for the teaching and preaching of the gospel locally and can support preachers abroad, provide for the development of Christian men and women, provide for the development of teachers and preachers, and to worship God in a collective manner. We do not see any local churches in the NT providing support to man-made organizations (**2 Corinthians 8:1-5, 2 Timothy 2:1-2, Titus 2:1-8, Hebrews 10:24-25**).
* **Why don’t we have an elaborate organization such as other churches?** We find no organization that oversees a local church or multiple churches authorized by Jesus Christ. We find no board of directors, presidents, councils, archbishops, apostles on this earth, etc., that oversee the work of churches. We simply find elders/pastors that oversee the work of only the local church they are a part of with the assistance of deacons (**Philippians 1:1, 1 Peter 5:1-4**).
* **Why don’t we provide financial help from the Oak Ridge treasury to those who are not Christians?** Providing poor and needy folks of this world with help is commanded of all of us Christians (**Matthew 25:37-40, Galatians 6:10, 1 Timothy 6:17-19, James 1:25-27**). However, we find no example of NT churches providing financial assistance to non-Christians from the Lord’s collections taken up each Sunday.

***\*As I said at the beginning, God’s word on these things is not complicated. Man is the one who complicates things.***

For those of us who are Christians, let us be content to live within the authority of the New Testament scriptures so that we do not fall away (**2 Timothy 4:2-3, 1 Corinthians 15:58, 2 Peter 3:17-18, 2 John 9**).

Let us pray for our friends and loved ones who are members of churches practicing things that do not please God. Let us also be motivated to reach out to them with the gospel of Jesus.

We have studied why we of the Oak Ridge church of Christ are different this morning. Being different is not always a bad thing. Being different in the Lord’s church is a very good thing as explained by Peter in **1 Peter 2 (verses 4-5, 9-11).** If you want to be a part of the Lord’s saved, we encourage you to believe in Jesus, be willing to confess that He is the Son of God, repent of your sins, and be baptized to wash away your sins. Then you can be different in a good way, shining the light of Jesus as you influence a world in much darkness. **HOW ABOUT YOU THIS MORNING?**

If we can help you now, please come forward while we stand and sing!