

Are They Really So Nice?

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It is common knowledge that a serious new thrust is being made to create unity between the churches of Christ and the Independent Christian Church. It has been distinctly implied by some of our unity-happy brethren that the only ones among us who object to their plans are a group they style as “cantankerous,” “ignorant” brethren of the “prolific right wing of the church.” Such “knuckleheads” have sought to “emaciate” certain leaders of this latest unity effort by their “spurious and erroneous reports that have appeared in some of our brotherhood scandal sheets,” to hear them tell it. These are not all of the terms of endearment that have been used, but they are illustrative.

Strangely, not one word has been said by our brethren who are so anxious to unite with the ICC about anything but the sweetest spirit on the part of ICC men — no less than absolute gentlemen who would never raise a voice or hurl an epithet! (Of course, it is most likely that those fellows attending the “Summit” in Joplin, MO (August 1984) and the “Forum” in Tulsa, OK (March 1985) were of that sort. All other types were excluded from the Joplin meeting, both by type of men who were invited and by being asked to go home if they could not so act as the “Summit” began.)

Perhaps we will have a more balanced view of some of the men and the doctrinal views they hold by noticing some of their “unvarnished” statements relative to the Lord's church and certain principles of Scripture. With this aim in mind, I submit the following:

After a long review of an excellent article by brother Gary Workman in *The Restorer* (April 1984) on Romans 4, the editor of *The Banner of Truth*, Fred Blakely, concluded with the following summary (August 1984):

Workman's objective in his “exegesis” seems to have been to bind upon those who will hear him a punctilious obedience to all “the law of Christ” in order to obtain salvation. Such an attitude toward salvation by grace through faith has largely captivated the sect with which he is identified in a mesh of soul-shackling legalism which has robbed them as a people of experience of the life, confidence and liberty Godward through Christ, which is the heritage of those who lived and walk by faith, not by law, or sight.

In his opening statement on brother Workman's true article, Blakely said: “Actually, the confident editor exposed, his own serious benightedness and error on the subject and left it in a worse state of confusion than when he sought to expound it.”

The same writer offers his opinion of our great sin in the March 1985 Banner of Truth:

The sin of anti-instrumentalists — and it is a great and notable sin, not just an innocuous error of judgment — is in their banning mechanical instruments of music (except the pitch pipe and tuning fork) from singing in the assembly of the church. By doing this they usurped the throne of God, reversing His authorization of such usage and so cursed what God has blessed. (Remember Balaam and his end!) There is no greater sin than such presumptuous action. We call upon those guilty of this transgression to think seriously upon their deed, and turn from it in genuine repentance. The command of the heavenly voice is, “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common,” much less anathematize it (Acts 10:15).

Yet another statement from Mr. Blakely {Banner of Truth, October, 1984}, he reviews brother Tom Warren’s excellent little book, *Christians Only – And the Only Christians*. Under the title, “A Church of Christ Manifesto,” he writes as follows:

Its error is in apparently equating the church of Christ (sectarian) with the bonafide body of the Lord, and insisting that men submit to its traditions and inferences as the very Word of God — Certainly, all of Warren’s opinions and judgments cannot be received as those of God. Being in the tradition of dogmatism and exclusivism represented by second-generation Restorationists Benjamin Franklin and Daniel Sommer, the booklet is actually a current Church of Christ (sectarian) manifesto.

Another man in the Independent Christian Church who does considerable writing is Ray Downen of Joplin, MO. He is a “grace only” advocate who affirms that “... Christians are not under law at all” (*Christians Are Re-Born Free From Law*, booklet published August 25, 1983, p. 5). In a brief tract entitled, “Concerning Authority in Christ’s Church,” he writes as follows:

When Paul wrote to the church in Colossae, Thomas B. Warren supposes he was writing about “the matter of authority” in 3:17. The expression, “in the name of” means “by the authority of,” brother Warren explains. The same axe man, in demanding that all Christians accept a “Law of Authority” he claims, comes from God, goes on to misapply “faith comes by hearing. . .” What sort of blinders does a man have to wear to know no better than that?

Mr. Downen favored me with the tract quoted above, including it in a letter filled with sarcasms about one of my articles he had read. In a recent letter to brother Warren, Mr. Downen expressed himself as follows:

You are not defending Christ’s church, you are defending your narrow, sectarian misunderstanding of it. Your writing makes clear that you think salvation is limited to those who share your logical assumptions about truth. You think most Christians will go to Hell since they don’t agree with you about instrumental music, re-marriage, the millennium, etc. Your writings are legalistic and not in harmony with gospel truth.

I suspect that a statement made at the “Tulsa Forum” in March of 1985 (a sequel to the “Restoration Summit” of August 1984) by one of the Independent Christian Church men

may be representative of their general thinking. Kenny Boles of Ozark Bible College made the following statement in his speech:

If it is your heartfelt conviction that the use of the piano, or other instruments is sin; if it is your heartfelt conviction that I am damned to hell thereby, it's gonna be tough, it's gonna be tough for us to be brothers. Is there a difference between sin and error? If you believe I am in error, I can talk about that. If you believe I am in sin, and going to hell, we've just drawn the battle lines, and we'll have to fight.

None of our folk would claim that all of us are free of improper attitudes. However, an incorrect impression has been left by some, whether intentionally or not, that the only ones with "bad attitudes" are some of us. The fact of the matter is that what seems to constitute a "bad attitude" in any of us is any expression of caution or criticism (to say nothing of exposure) concerning these efforts toward unity. Brethren, are we really so mean as some have made us, and are those in the Independent. Christian Church really so nice?

[Note: I wrote this MS for and it was published in the July 1985 edition of *Spiritual Sword*, ed. Thomas B. Warren.]

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