

Maybe Churches of Christ Aren't So Backwards After All

Matthew Morine
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“Any fool can criticize, condemn and complain and most fools do.” These famous words of Benjamin Franklin continue to resound for the current generation. Too often Christians fall prey to the grumbling and rumbling spirit. One becomes enamored with the problems of the churches of Christ without the sweet reasonableness of grace and forbearance. A mature disciple is not blind to problems, rather she is tempered through a Philippians 4:8 spirit: “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” Through the years, much negativity has encompassed the churches of Christ. There was this vibe that the preaching and teaching in our pulpits and classrooms were somehow under par to the denominational world. There was a perception that the churches of Christ were a bunch of “backwoods, hillbillies” that could not intellectually keep up with the bright thinkers of the community church movement. Through the years, I have found this mindset to be wrong!

Strong Biblical Understanding

The majority of my formal training in ministry has been completed in schools that are connected to the churches of Christ. But one summer, there was a class that was canceled at Harding School of Theology, so my professor recommended that I take a course at Denver Seminary which is close to my home. For some reason, I assumed that this class about church development would reveal the hidden mysteries of church growth, which the churches of Christ have missed. The professor had us read ten books and write a paper about our local working context. Instead of discovering that the Seminary had all the answers, I realized that my training from our brotherhood institutions was a first-class experience. There were no hidden secrets, no quick solutions, and in fact, the seminary had little to offer me because the teachers did not understand my context in ministry and spent the majority of the time demeaning my faith. These people were not experts in love, tolerance, and grace, but were like a lot of people who are struggling with the ministry as I do.

Strong Biblical Preaching

Sometimes people feel that the preaching in the churches of Christ is second-rate. There is this notion that all of the best preachers are filling denominational pulpits. Fortunately, through the years, my training has taken me to some of the more prestigious universities. I have sat in classes with some of the most famous teachers in the art of preaching and have heard a few of the outstanding orators through the years. But over and over again, the best instruction comes from the men who deliver messages for the Lord's Church. There are many Ph.D.'s in homiletics who have preached polished sermons, but a sermon by Mike Vestal still ranks a home run each time he speaks. Wendell Winkler preached the best sermon ever about heaven. The greatest communicators of God's word are those within the churches of Christ. The preachers in our churches have a passion for the word, are in love with Jesus, and are skilled at applying the message to our hearts.

Through the years, I have heard this phrase, "The churches of Christ are on the other side of the tracks." This always seemed to mean that the church is poor, uneducated, and somehow inferior to other religious groups. As the church, we should not care about looking successful or be concerned with keeping up with other religious groups. Instead, we should be sold out for Christ and his Church. We can be thankful for the blessings within the church, but we must never confuse the need for the aura of success with the power of God. Paul states in 1 Corinthians 1:26-29 "For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world,

even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.” Much is right with the church, but the most right thing is Christ is Lord.