

IS THE CHURCH OF CHRIST A SECT?

by Tom Wacaster

The word "sect" is used nine times in the New Testament. It is translated four times with the English word "sect," and five times with the word "heresies." W.E. Vine tells us that the word means "a predilection either for a particular truth, or for a perversion of one, generally with the expectation of personal advantage; hence, a division and the formation of a party or sect in contrast to the uniting power of 'the truth,' held in toto; a sect is a division developed and brought to an issue." When Paul arrived in Rome those who were "the chief of the Jews" met with him and said, "We neither received letters from Judaea concerning thee, nor did any of the brethren come hither and report or speak any harm to thee. But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, it is known to us that everywhere it is spoken against" (Acts 28:21-22). It is important to note that Paul did not regard the church as a sect. When he stood before Felix, having been charged by the Jews as a trouble maker, Paul said, "But this I confess unto thee, that after the Way which they call a sect, so serve I the God of our fathers" (Acts 24:14).

The change agents among us would have us believe that the church is a sect, nothing more than a heretical, pompous group of dogmatic knuckleheads incapable of understanding God's love and mercy. One brother has written, "We are crusading against the tyranny of ecclesiastical professionals within the Christian commonwealth, for we believe the system they espouse is cancerous to the one body of believers." Another has written, "'Church' is not found in the oldest of Greek manuscripts. Why did the translators fail to delete 'church'? Because it became the clergy's sacred cow. This sacred cow gave birth to many calves, some of which are Roman Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Luthern. History confirms that subsequent deliveries were named Church of Christ [emphasis mine, TW], Church of God, and Assembly of God." Still another writes, "It is true that Churches of Christ, like other sects, have reduced the Christian system to mere professional employment and sectarian ecclesiasticalism." It is manifest by their writings that these brethren "went out from us....that they might be made manifest that they are not of us" (1 John 2:19).

One of the charges laid at the feet of those who seek a "thus saith the Lord" is the accusation that churches of Christ have been too judgmental in their refusal to fellowship denominations. This, according to some, makes us 'sectarian.' Loyalty to the truth of God's word does not make someone sectarian. If the Bible forbids fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness (Eph. 5:11), then compliance to that God-given command is not heretical, nor is it a manifestation of a "sectarian spirit," as some are claiming. Another charge laid at our feet is that the churches of Christ are too arrogant in their claims of being the the one true church. If the Bible plainly says there is one body (and it does, Ephesians 4:4-5), am I sectarian because I preach that message? If the Bible plainly says that all spiritual blessings are in that one body (and it does, Ephesians 1:3), am I sectarian because I practice and teach that truth? If the Bible plainly says that one must be baptized in order to enter into that one body (and it does, 1 Corinthians 12:13), am I sectarian because I obey and preach that truth? May I go on record: If it is "sectarian" to believe there is one body and that the body is the church, that one must conform to God's will in order to be pleasing in His sight, that God authorizes only singing in worship

music, and that men and women who promote denominationalism will be lost, then I plead guilty as charged.

But before one frown on this self-admitted declaration, let him examine the scriptures and see that the Holy Spirit has clearly revealed that each of the afore mentioned "sectarian" beliefs are in compliance with God's will. Sectarianism is the result of departure from those things, not compliance to them. Hence, those who maintain loyalty to the truth are not sectarian. Brother Darrell Conley wrote, "The church for which Jesus died is not a sect. It is the original. Is the whole of God's saved people. Simply because men have invented counterfeit churches, does not make the church of Christ a counterfeit. The counterfeits are the sects." The present push by some of our once faithful brethren to align the church with the "Christian community" at large is a tragic mistake. In the final analysis it will actually turn the church into the very thing which some of our accusers now say we are - a sect.