

**F. B. Shepherd THE CHURCH WHICH IS HIS BODY Gospel Advocate 2/25/1932 – Vol. 74. No. 8:**

I believe God's way in everything is the only *right* way. It is that which cannot but be. I believe, therefore, that every provision made by God for the performance of any work or the attaining of any end sought by him is a perfect provision, needing no revising or improvement upon in order that it might perfectly produce the results for which it was designed. God does not experiment. (Isa.55: 8-11.) He never has in any dispensation.

I believe that whatsoever is left out of divine revelation on any subject on which God has seen fit to express himself has been left out deliberately by divine wisdom, and we tread dangerous ground when we seek to supply the missing details. I believe, therefore, that any attempt upon the part of man to revise or improve upon any organization, institution, or ordinance of God is to discount such, will reflect upon it, and really injure God's provision. I believe it is exceedingly sinful to presume any deficiencies and seek to supply them.

The material universe, on one hand, and the human body, on the other, furnish us excellent illustrations of these claims. The divine procedure in the promulgation of the gospel through the apostles and its absolute success during their lifetime is also complete proof in the realm of the spiritual.

I believe these principles are just as true when referred to the church of Jesus Christ today as they ever could have been in the matter of any institution of God in any age or dispensation or for any purpose. Legitimately, the churches of Christ have but two functions to perform. These are preaching the gospel, which is God's power unto salvation, to the world of men, and attending to their internal individual affairs as local representatives of the Master. Such all-sufficiency in these matters is clearly affirmed in the names by which they are described in the Bible and amply demonstrated in the records of their activities in apostolic days. Such names and descriptions as, "fullness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1: 23); "house of God" (2 Tim. 3: 15); "body of Christ" (Col.1: 24) ; "that now unto the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3: 10) ; and "building of God" (1 Cor. 3:9), fully bear out this contention here being made.

There is absolutely no precept or example in the Holy Scriptures for the existence of any organization, federation, or society which embraces more or less than one local congregation through which to perform the work of the Lord in the furtherance of the gospel. No Methodist conference, no Presbyterian synod, no general assembly, no Roman Catholic, Anglican, Primitive or Missionary Baptist churches, with their pope, archbishops, bishops, pastors, deacons, stewards, etc., and acting as separate divisions of the great whole, can be Scriptural. No missionary societies, Y. M. C. A.'s, Y. W. C. A.'s, Y. P. S. C. E.'s, B. Y. P. U.'s, with presidents, vice presidents, treasurers, secretaries, etc., and federation, have authority in the word of God. There were no preachers' institutes, officers' unions, associations of churches, conferences of churches, publication societies, or annual, quarterly, or monthly meetings of churches to plan the policies of the whole while the apostles lived or for many years after they died. Yet every local need was met promptly and efficiently and every evangelistic opportunity was embraced completely and efficiently. It is a highly refreshing study to ponder such passages as Acts 2: 44, 45; 4: 32-35; 6: 1-6; Col. 1: 6, 23.

Because it was made according to the pattern, the first church was completely furnished unto every good work. Its very simplicity was evidently one reason that it was absolutely sufficient and efficient in all things demanded of it. As a benevolent institution, it was without blemish; as a missionary society or evangelistic medium, it lacked nothing. Any further organization today to do the things for which God organized the

body of Christ of necessity reflects to the dishonor of the church. It presumes the church is not capable, efficient, or adequate to do the things it was ordained unto. Such organizations discount God's provision, disparage his plans, minimize his organization, dishonor him and his Christ, our Savior.

If we organize or sustain a separate society for the doing of each particular work or for the special association of particular groups of workers, who will be left for, or in, the churches? The church then will become a useless thing. Faith in the completeness of the church is weakened when such organizations are established. Faith in the all-sufficiency is awakened and deepened when we are satisfied with the simplicity which is in Christ. Faith in the society or institution is strengthened otherwise. Let us give our all to the divine institution. It can be done. We must do it. And if every man or woman who professes to be a child of God would thus regard the church of Jesus Christ, it would not be long until the gospel would be preached to every nation under heaven again and we would be having tens of thousands of additions yearly where we now have hundreds.