

The Church of Christ
(The SECT everywhere spoken against, Part One)

by

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“But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect” (Acts 28:22)

The statement above was spoken to the Apostle Paul while he was captive at Rome. In the last six chapters of the acts of the Apostles we have the account of Paul’s trial and his voyage to Rome, where he was taken as a prisoner for his devotion and labors in the cause of Christ. He was accused of being the ringleader in spreading a heresy! In fact, this heresy was everywhere spoken against!

In asking Paul about this sect, these people in Rome took a course that is very different from that which is pursued by most today. Today, just because a persons views contradict the established religious party views, they say: “We do not desire to hear you, for, as for this sect, it is everywhere spoken against!” The ones in Paul’s day, however, acted on a different principle. They, in effect, said: “Now Paul, we know that the sect that you are advocating, which is being spoken against all over the country; we know that all of the religious parties oppose you, but we are not willing for form an opinion of you or your sect by what other say. We know that your enemies will not fairly represent your views, so we want to hear you on the subject, as one of the advocates and leaders of this sect.” My dear readers, was not that the more honorable course to take? Surely it was!

Just what is meant by the word SECT? That term was not always as popular as it is now. It is used in Scriptures to define a party or group that is not orthodox. In Scriptures, as well as in ecclesiastical history, it is used in an evil sense. The Greek word translated “sect” is “haireisis,” which occurs, in all its inflections, only nine times in the New Testament. Depending upon the version you have, whether ancient or modern, it is translated either as “sect” or transliterated as “heresy.” This shows that the translators used the word “sect” and “heresy” interchangeably, as both signify the same thing; and no one today uses the term “heresy” in a favorable sense, but they do use the term “sect,” which is the same thing in a more favorable light.

What about the apostle Paul, does he use the term “sect” in a favorable sense? NO! As a matter of fact he numbers “sects” as a work of the flesh. He said: “The acts of the sinful nature (the flesh) are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, lewdness; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, SECTS and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:19–21). As you can see, Paul classes “sects” or “heresies” with the most terrible of crimes committed by humanity against God, and even goes so far as to say that “they who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”

The meaning of “sect” is, in its primary sense, “a cutting scion”—so says Webster’s Dictionary. In the Greek the term means “a party or a choice; disunion.” It seems to have come from the same root from which we get the word “section,” which means a part separated or cut off from the rest. Hence, Paul used the term which is rendered “sect” or “heresy,” to represent a party cut off or separated from the true Church Of Christ. The Church of Christ is not, then, a sect; it is the “body,” the true Church of God; a sect would be a section, a fragment, cut off from the true body. This is our reason for opposing the sectarian spirit of partisan men and parties.

We believe that the body of Christ is “one body,” and that in this body there should be no schism, and that no man has any divine right to draw away a party from the original body of believers and form a sect of it. This is heresy, the same heresy so often condemned by the writers of the New Testament Scriptures. There is no doubt these persons used the word in this sense in the text we are using. They were Jews, and they doubtlessly regarded Paul and those with him who had embraced Christianity from among the Jews, as heresy—a “sect,” a party cut off from the body of the Jewish religion.

Now, in this and the continuing articles on this subject of the Church of Christ, the sect everywhere spoken against, we will use the term to merely designate the body to which Paul belonged, and not to sanction its use. We will now present a few plain propositions in reference to the body of believers with which Paul stood identified. In doing this, we do not intend to make any leading statements that will not be received as true by all who may read this dissertation.

1. The sect was everywhere spoken against.

It seems that all parties, the Jews, made up of Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots and Scribes; the Gentiles, made up of all other religious views, were not sects in any sense of the word. They each had their own ideology. Even though they couldn’t agree on everything and were at sword’s point on almost every subject, yet, when this sect was to be opposed, they dropped every one of their dissensions for the time being and made one united effort to poison public opinion in reference to the sect advocated by Paul. This is not the only people that have acted thus, nor is this the last time that such temporary unions have been formed for the purpose of opposing this same cause. Many hard things were said of these believers in Christ. Let’s notice some of them.

a) They were charged with worshipping God contrary to the laws of the fathers (Acts 18:13).

This was a very serious charge. In our own day this would, in the estimation of most people, destroy a man’s religious reputation. Just let it be said of a man that he is introducing forms of worship contrary to the established ecclesiastical practices of the church, and watch how soon he would be condemned by the “leaders of orthodoxy”—our modern day Pharisees. They would cry “Innovation! Innovation! And stop all ears from hearing him. His standing in the community would be ruined. Yes, this was said of Paul and his helpers; this was one of the things spoken against this sect everywhere!

b) They were charged with “heresy.”

This was enough to spoil Paul’s influence with a lot of people. Just point at a man and cry out “Heresy! Heresy!” and see how fast you can get people to oppose him. You ruin his standing in the view of all. Paul was charged with this as you can read in the last chapters of Acts. When Paul made his defense before the Roman Governor, he said: “But this I confess, that after the way which ‘they call heresy,’ so worship I the God of my fathers” (Acts 24:14). Notice that Paul does not confess that he is guilty of heresy, but that he worships God in the WAY that THEY CALL heresy. Paul admits that they charged him with heresy, and if they are permitted to determine what is heresy, he would be condemned. And who would not be, even in this day of light and liberty, if the accuser is permitted to prefer the charge, explain in what it consists, and then apply the law?

c) They were charged with teaching customs which were not lawful for others to observe. (See Acts 16:21.)

This was not a venial charge, Because of this charge, Paul and Silas were whipped with the might of a Roman soldier. They were then thrown into a cold damp jail. This very same charge would ruin a man’s standing with a majority of the sects of today. The sects of today, like those of ages ago, have rules and practices stereotyped into a fixed form. Just imagine what the partisans of today would say if a man did what Paul did and said. They would say, as their counterparts said a long time ago: “This is teaching some new customs! Customs not lawful for us to observe!” And by this they would destroy his influence. This is what was said of Paul and his helpers.

This was very necessary, for the religious world was wrong side up for a long time. Still, it was a very severe charge, one that was calculated to destroy the influence of Christianity. By this they meant that this sect was a set of “disorganizers; upsetting the old ecclesiastical organizations, disturbing the quietness of society, unsettling everything, and settling nothing.” There are now some men living against whom these same things are said, and the ones who are speaking against them know something about the influence such a charge has in turning the people against their words. But all of this, and a lot more than we cannot now mention, was spoken against Paul and his helpers of this sect everywhere spoken against.

d) They were charged with turning the world upside down. (See Acts 17:6.)

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2. The second point in reference to this sect is that, in the sight of God, this was the only true sect, the only right “church” in the world.

Yes, it’s true, notwithstanding all parties opposed to this sect, God acknowledged it with signs, wonders and other acts. This was the only sect God approved of for men to belong to. To this no one objects! All say it is true! Should not this fact teach all to be very sparing of the condemnatory denunciations against those claiming to be Christians—disciples of Christ, lest he be found to be fighting against God? It often happens that things highly esteemed by men are very lightly esteemed by God, while the things man disapproves of and condemns are very precious in God’s sight. In this we speak of traditions men highly esteem instead of esteeming what God has told us to esteem and practice.

3. A third point to be made in reference to this sect is that God never authorized the existence of any other sect or religious body.

Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). And He asked: “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” Jesus praised Peter of this and said, “And on this rock I will build of me the church” (Matthew 16:15–18). What or who is this “rock” Jesus mentions? Let’s let Scriptures tell us so that we will not be deceived. “For other foundation no one can lay, but that which has been laid, which is Christ Jesus” (1 Corinthians 3:11). And, “And the rock was Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:4). Scriptures say that the rock was Christ, and this all agree upon, for who dares call God’s Holy Spirit, who moved chosen men to write the Scriptures, a liar? (See 2 Peter 1:21.)

As shown, Jesus said he would build His called out assembly upon the truth that “He is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” Not once does he say he would build more than one body of believers or that he would build it upon another man. It is HIS ekklesia! HIS called out people! It is HIS church! HE is the ROCK that men stumble over, falling to the ground when put in their path; but woe unto the one whom the ROCK falls upon, for it will crush and destroy!

But, men have erected other “churches,” and then, not with HIS name, but their own. I now ask you, where, in ALL the writings of the inspired apostles of Jesus the Christ, do we find any command authorizing the right for forming any other sect than the one that was at this time everywhere spoken against? Where do we find a clear warrant, license, or a divine permit, to do such a thing? Every Bible Scholar and student has the answer: NOWHERE AT ALL!

Now, if all this is true, and true it is, how important is it that we understand all the distinguishing characteristics of that sect spoken against? It is very, very, important! If this sect was the only right party at that time, and if God has never authorized the formation of any other religious party, we should surely be very anxious to learn all the features of that sect!

Because of the importance of this subject, we, in this series of articles, will define that party or sect from the records let to us—the Scriptures of the Bible. While we are engaged in this investigation, which we hope you will follow along, we wish every other sect or religious denomination to be left out of view; we will draw a curtain to shut off the views of every other religious party: the Roman Church, the Greek Orthodox Church, the Old Catholic Apostolic Church, the Reformation Churches, and all the modern sects that exist.

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