

“... on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” **Matthew 16:18**

## Store In My Heart

### 1Samuel 8:7

The Lord said to Samuel, “Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them.”

This book begins with the story of Samuel, Israel’s last judge. While Samuel walked in the ways of God, his sons did not and Israel sought to be ruled by a king like the nations around them. They were not satisfied with being different from others.

The main topic of the two books of Samuel is the story of the first two kings God gave to Israel. Saul, who looked like a king but was not faithful to God, and David, who is described as “a man after God’s own heart.” This is the story of the rise of Israel as a great nation and it also reveals the cause of her fall from God’s care and protection.



# Institutionalism Defined

## Tommy Thornhill

Anyone reading and studying religious history soon learns that man has seldom been satisfied with the Lord's arrangements. Human wisdom is forever seeking to improve upon the Lord's plans, and it seems that in every generation men will rise up to say, (in actions if not in words), "Lord, I think I can improve on your plan." This inevitably leads to a departure from *"the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints."* (**Jude 3**). Human wisdom is clearly seen in the development of Institutionalism.

Coming from the old school that teaches one should never assume everyone in the audience understands the subject under consideration, I feel it necessary to define "Institutionalism." Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, (10th ed.) defines it as an "emphasis on organization (as in religion) at the expense of other factors." An older edition defines it as, " a belief in and support of the usefulness or sanctity of established institutions." The suffix "ism" suggests "a devotion to" the thing. And this certainly describes our society today. Probably no society in history has been so institutional minded.

This love of institutions has spilled over into the Lord's church. Today, we see a proliferation of institutions far beyond that which could have been foreseen in the 50's when I began preaching. Since we are dealing with spiritual affairs that affect the church, the secular definition above needs to be expanded. For this study, "Institutionalism," as I understand it, is "the belief that the Church of Christ is an organization, composed of individual congregations. These churches, either individually or acting collectively, have the right to organize, build, promote, and maintain dependent social

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We want opportunities to speak with others about the Lord's Kingdom.

**Church of Christ**  
1512 Tanner Street  
Malvern, AR 72104  
(501) 332-8806

## Find Us Online

preacher@tannerst.com

**tannerst.com**  
**FB @TannerStCoC**

## For Our Information

Paula Laubach is doing well with recovery and her physical therapy.

Joyce Venable is still having a difficult time with her health.

Ruben returns to the doctor in mid April but is getting back to some normal activities slowly.

Tonight we start our study in 1Samuel 2:27 at 5 pm.

Wednesday we will begin our study in 2Corinthians 7:8.

**Pray for safety, courage & healing.**

organizations - such as schools, benevolent homes, welfare agencies, etc. - which aid in fulfilling society's social and spiritual needs. Since these organizations perform 'good works' sister congregations and individuals are to support them (at least in word, if not in practice)." To this mindset, loyalty to these human institutions determines one's (individual or church) loyalty to Christ. Institutions are necessary to the "institutional church," and the "institutional church" is necessary for such human institutions to exist.

From a purely human standpoint, supporting such institutions might be commendable, and thus deserving of our approval. BUT, from a divine standpoint they exist without God's approval (authority) and are deviations from His divine pattern for the church. There is only one religious institution that exists with God's approval, and that is the local church (**Philippians 1:1**). The existence of human institutions deny the wisdom of God and the all-sufficiency of the Lord's church. The church cannot, with divine approval, transfer the work of the local church to some humanly devised institution, nor does any human organization have the right to promote and solicit funds from churches to do the work God has given the local church to perform. Read and study **Colossians 3:17; 1Corinthians 4:6; 2Timothy 1:13; Philippians 4:9; 2Thessalonians 2:15; Hebrews 8:5**.

Institutional perversions in church organization and function take place because people fail to understand the nature of the church, and/or fail to comprehend the word "church" is used in two senses, (1) universal, and (2) local. They view the universal church as an organization, rather than a relationship. The Church of Christ, universally, is not an institution, but a living organism (people not things). It is composed of God's saved people (**Acts 2:47**), related to Christ and one another, as members of His body, the church (**Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22-23**). The church, (universal or local) always denotes people in the right relationship to God. They are "called out" of the world to be "*His own special people*" (**1Peter 2:9-10**). The failure to grasp these concepts leads to institutionalism.

In the universal sense, the church is strictly a relationship. God has never authorized any machinery by which the church, universally, is to function. It has no earthly organization, hence no duty or mission to perform. When fallible men (regardless of how well-intentioned) attempt to activate the church universally, with some super-organization, they are pitting their puny human will against the infallible wisdom of God (1Corinthians 3:19). Institutional-minded brethren either do not comprehend, or refuse to accept this fact as they set about formulating and promoting their human organizations and institutions.

(This issue continues to be something we need to understand I hope this article can help us as we struggle to remain true to the Word. DLH)



**We seek only to serve God according to His Will!**