

Smith-Holt Debate:

Clarifying The Issues

September 30 through October 4, 1985, Brother J.T. Smith (J.T.S.), and I met in a public discussion of some Biblical differences between us. The discussion was held in Lake Jackson, Texas. It was hosted by the church for which J.T.S. is the preacher. It lasted five nights, two hours each evening, with each speaker having two alternating 30-minute speeches. The attendance was good; better than I expected. A large number of preachers came for part or all of the discussion; some from far-away places. Some non-preachers came from distant cities. It would have been wonderful if more of the non-preacher folk had attended to study and learn. There was a better day when this would have been the case. The behavior of the audience was commendable.

Thus we see again that public discussions, even between brethren, can be conducted in a worthy manner as far as the conduct on the part of speakers and the audience is concerned. It is pathetic that apparently the majority of our people have come to hold a bad image of religious debates. It is likely that 90% of those who think this way have never attended one! Thus they believe and speak from ignorance and prejudice!

Among honorable and free people, the public debate has always been a noble method or forum for presenting conflicting views for the benefit of concerned hearers.

(See the article in this issue: ["The Religious Debate."](#)) We need more, not less, of them. But the disputants, and even the audience, should be men who have the search for truth as the ultimate goal of such an endeavor. They must not oppose or attack persons, but issues. Sophistry and quibbling have no place in honorable discussion, but this is often utilized, willfully or ignorantly, by some disputants.

I am grateful to God and to the Lake Jackson brethren, especially to J.T.S., for hosting the discussion so that we could all study these subjects in the light of God's word. It is certain to do more good for the cause of truth than we can ever know.

Perhaps I am not the best choice to write an objective report of the discussion, so I will not attempt such a thing at this time. My objective is to explain the propositions and clearly identify the basic differences between us for the benefit of the readers. They are matters of great importance and such understanding is essential to honest, objective study.

Basically, there were two major topics and they are closely related. The first three nights the issue was, in simple terms, **"What is the church (ecclesia) of Christ?"** Does the ecclesia (church) of Christ refer **only** to people, the saved, the disciples; or, when speaking of the ecclesia (church) in a specific place, does it then refer to an **institution** -- such as we today call "the local church"?

The first night I affirmed the following proposition: "The Scriptures teach • that the local ecclesia of Christ • has reference to nothing more • than disciples or saints • in a given area or context, • who may act individually and/or together with others [meaning a Christian may act as an individual, that is, alone, in fulfilling some duties required of him by God; and/or he may act **as an individual** together with other individuals in doing some things conjointly.] • in carrying out the Lord's will; • and there is no requirement (pattern) from God • that they form or constitute themselves • into an organic institutional body corporate • (functional unit) • for doing any work ordained by God."

I have divided up the long proposition in the above manner, using the • mark between each "piece," so that it can be more easily understood. Please study it carefully, each part separately; and then as a whole. It is vital that each one comprehends what the points at issue are. Also, it is important that you recognize that even though I was in the affirmative, I was nevertheless affirming a negative. In other words, I was simply affirming that what J.T.S. was to affirm -- to prove by the Scriptures -- the second and third nights, is **not** true! (See proposition No. 2 elsewhere).

Proposition No. I Explained

Let me restate my position using the basic part of the proposition above:

"The local ecclesia of Christ has reference to nothing more than disciples or saints...and there is no requirement (pattern) from God that they form or constitute themselves into --

- an organic institutional body corporate
- or functional unit
- for doing any work ordained by God."

Either that is true or it is false. It is really the obligation of J.T.S. and all who believe such, to prove that there is a requirement or explicit pattern from God for disciples to form such a thing; that is, an organization or functional unit **of themselves!** Get the point, please. It is J.T.S.'s position that God requires Christians **to form or constitute themselves into an institution or organization** that he calls "the local church." It follows, therefore, that until and unless the disciples deliberately constitute themselves into such an **institution**, Smith's brand of "the local church" does not even exist!

I say "Smith's brand" because I would have no great objection to speaking of "the local church" if all that is meant is the disciples or saints in a given area, assembled or unassembled. I think much of our problem lies in our invented terms like "local" and "universal" that are used to describe non-New Testament concepts and ideas. The New Testament never speaks of either "the **local** church" or "the **universal** church." It does speak often of "the church" and that term means the same thing in every instance. It always refers to disciples, saints, believers, God's people. In fact, J.T.S. acknowledged twice in the debate that there is nothing **inherent** in the word "ecclesia" (church) other than people! With that necessary admission of truth, he surrenders his whole case. The word "church" is used (**mis-used** is the truth of the matter) for a translation of the Greek word "ecclesia." It refers to God's people, as an assembly or congregation of these people

under God and Christ. As W.L. Wharton and Robert Turner often put it: "When you think 'church', think people!" That is right on target.

For example, when J.T.S. speaks of "the universal **church**," he refers **only** to people. He believes "the universal **church**" is nothing more than God's redeemed people. It is **not** an institution, organization, body corporate, functioning unit. In fact, he would oppose such a thing. Neither the word "universal" nor the word "church" has any reference to an organization or institution.

Yet when he speaks of "the local **church**" (ecclesia), lo and behold, the word "church" (ecclesia) takes on a totally different meaning! It now refers to an "organized, functional, institutional entity (body corporate)" and does **not** refer merely to disciples, saints, God's people! It is the same word, "church" (ecclesia), in both cases. Yet the word has two totally different meanings. No wonder there is confusion. This is a wholly unjustified use of the word. If the word "church" refers only to disciples/saints in one place, it surely must mean the same in other places. His concept expressed by the term, "the local church" meaning a "formal organization" or institution is totally wrong.

The word "church" (ecclesia) has no inherent restrictions or limitations relative to geography or place. It refers to the same people, all of them, that Jesus spoke of when He promised, "*Upon this rock I will build My **church**,*" (Matt. 16:18). The meaning is, "Upon this rock (the truth confessed by Peter), I will build, establish, My **people**." The word "church" embraces **all** the redeemed, God's people, everywhere, **without any divisions** into separate, independent, autonomous functional units, pens, parties, or schisms of any sort or kind! J.T.S.'s position is a **doctrine** that has been invented to justify what men have done to the Lord's ecclesia (church)!

In the New Testament there is "no requirement (pattern) from God" that the disciples "form or constitute themselves into an organic institutional body corporate (functional unit)" that J.T.S. calls "the local church." (See propositions No. 1 and No. 2). Where is that requirement? Where is that pattern? Where is the record or teaching which proves that disciples were **divided** (and I emphasize that word because it is a proper term for the results!) into independent, autonomous organizations that we call "the local church" corporation? J.T.S. did not present scriptural proof for such! He assumed it and then asserted such to be true.

In the discussion I pointed out that in the New Testament there was nothing the equivalent of today's functional church units or organizations; each one separate, distinct, independent and **divided** from each other! With each one operating its own little "business" in its own little world, with no relationship whatever with any other such corporate body. I asked for **scriptural proof** that God's people were **divided** into operating, functional units (each a body corporate!), and none was given! (Check the record -- the speeches -- for yourself.) We have **assumed** that what we have today is exactly what they had then. After all, we boldly claim that **we** follow the pattern! **We** follow God's word! Therefore, **we** are the true church! Since **we** are a "pattern people," it must follow that what we have today must certainly be what they had then! It must be

what the Lord set up! This is **our** way of reasoning in justifying everything we want to do in our day; from the professional "located preacher" to "the local church" corporation. For our "idols" we will find justification -- in our own mind. God will allow us to see and believe what our hearts are set upon.

In the New Testament the expression "the church" (ecclesia), when referring to God's people, is always without any restrictions or limitations. It embraces **all** of them. Let me put it like this: "**the church**" equals **all** of God's people -- everywhere!

Now if you want to break this down and refer to, or speak of, a specific portion or part of God's people, you can do it (scripturally) as was done in the New Testament. For example: "the church **in Jerusalem**," which simply means that portion of God's people in Jerusalem and its environs. But it refers **only** to God's **people** in Jerusalem; it has no reference whatever to an institution or organization. It has no reference to a "local church" body corporate, separate, independent, autonomous, and **divided** from other "units" such as we have today. In Jerusalem, where there must have been at least 50,000 disciples, they were not organized into various independent functional units. The individual Christians were not **divided** and separated from one another. The disciples did not "form or constitute themselves" into various organizations or functioning units in different parts of the city. They never started a "church unit" anywhere. Not by the Lord's direction or teaching. There is "no requirement (pattern) from God" for such **divisions** as that!

Paul wrote "*to the church of God which is at Corinth...*" (I Cor. 1:2). The word "church" has no limitations in and of itself. Hence, to identify that specific portion or part of God's people to whom he is writing, Paul had to add the limiting phrase, "which is at Corinth." Isn't that simple and clear? It is this same way in every case in the New Testament. Paul was **not** writing to an institution, organization, or body corporate. He was not writing to an independent, autonomous functioning **unit**, such as "the local church" of today. There was no such **thing** then! When Paul wrote "to the church of God which is at Corinth" he wrote to God's people at Corinth; all of them as individuals! He wrote to those **individuals** at Corinth who were "called to be **saints**."

Now let me lay it out in full. **Please** do not judge or evaluate what I am offering until you really understand it, and the basis for it all. It is not easy to grasp or clearly comprehend for the same reasons it is very difficult for a Baptist or Methodist to understand, comprehend, the way of salvation. They have never heard it that way before. It is very different from the way they have been taught. Their first reaction is to reject it outright, without any serious consideration, because it disturbs them at the very base of their religious life. Immediately they see that if what is preached exactly as Peter did it on Pentecost is true, then it follows that they are wrong; they are not even saved! This is a terrible shock and their reaction is often total rejection. Thus they turn away from truth without understanding it. They refuse to study or examine the matter. How sad. Yet this is often our reaction to something different or new to us; especially if it runs contrary to what we believe and practice. We often refuse to consider the matter seriously. We don't want to be disturbed.

By all means you should reject what is wrong or contrary to God's word; but **first** try to understand the teaching and base your rejection upon an honest consideration of the matter in the light of God's word (cf. Acts 17:11). Only then can one intelligently make the proper decision. Therefore, I plead with you to honestly "search the Scriptures" to see if these things are true or not. After all, it is **your** eternal destiny, as well as mine, that is at stake. This careful examination should be done **before** rejecting or accepting. To do this properly, you must first understand what is presented; and this likely will take some time and effort. The fact that you have never heard it before or that it is contrary to your belief and practice are not sound reasons for rejecting it and refusing to study the matter seriously.

Now, let me bring it down to the application for our day. Here are some facts to consider:

(1) Neither the expression "the local church" nor "the universal church" is found in the New Testament.

(2) There is nothing **inherent** in the word "ecclesia" (church) to indicate it refers to anything more or other than disciples or saints, God's people. But it does include **all** disciples/saints everywhere, without limitations or restrictions. Ecclesia is always **universal or comprehensive** in its meaning.

(3) There is nothing **inherent** in the word itself to indicate that it has any "local" use.

(4) Men have invented and use the modifiers "local" and "universal" to describe what we have gradually developed over the years that we call "the local church" or corporate body.

(5) The word "ecclesia" (church) refers only to disciples **as individuals** whether they are assembled together or not assembled. Being assembled does not change the situation; they are still God's people, worshipping or working in an orderly fashion as responsible individuals. In Acts 14:27-28, we are told that Paul and Barnabas "gathered **the church together**.." This was a gathering of "the disciples" together as individuals. It was not a meeting of a corporate body.

(6) One must learn from the context if there are any limitations or restrictions when we read of "the church." For example:

"the church in Ephesus ," (Rev. 2:1)

"the church in Smyrna," (Rev. 2:8)

"the church that is in their house," (I Cor. 16:19)

"the church of God which is at Corinth," (I Cor. 1:2)

In these cases it is easy to see that the reference is limited to that portion or part of God's people as is identified.

(7) Whether in the singular or in the plural, the word "ecclesia" (church) means nothing more than disciples or saints. (I repeat for emphasis!)

(8) In every place where the word "church" (ecclesia) is used in connection with a city, it is always in the **singular!** (Check it out.) We never read of a **plurality** of churches in a city! Why? Apparently it was because such did not exist. Let this fact register well in your mind. It is a vital point.

(9) The **plural** form of ecclesia, without exception, when referring to location, speaks of a country, a province, region, or of a plurality of cities. Let me give some examples:

"churches of Galatia," (I Cor. 16:1; Gal. 1:2)

"churches of Macedonia," (II Cor. 8:1)

"churches of Judea," (Gal. 1:22)

"churches of Syria," (Acts 15:41)

"churches of Asia," (I Cor. 16:19; Rev. 1:4)

"churches (of various cities as is indicated in the context)" (Acts 16:4-5)

There were seven **churches** in Asia; but there was only "the church" (singular), in each of the seven cities. This means that reference is to that portion or part of God's people ("the church") in each city. There were several cities in each country or province, where there was a portion of God's people (the church), hence, there was a plurality of churches in that country or region. This matter deserves a lot of careful study to comprehend fully. I am not sure that I fully understand. Is this usage of the singular and plural just accidental or incidental; or, did the Holy Spirit intend to teach us something with this distinction?

Now for a specific application: In Jerusalem there was no such thing as a

Northside Church of Christ

Southside Church of Christ

Eastside Church of Christ

Westside Church of Christ

Each of the above represents an independent, autonomous, separate, equal, **division** of God's people in many cities of our day. Some cities have 30-40 such distinct **divisions** of

the saints. No city in the New Testament is said to have a plurality of churches anything like we do. **All** the saints in Jerusalem and its environs were "the church" (ecclesia) in that city! **All** the saints there made up that portion of God's people ("the church" -- assembly or congregation) in Jerusalem. The same is true of every city where God's people could be found. God's people were **not divided** into independent, autonomous, functional and operational units, such as we have in "the local church;" body corporate today!

Paul's letter to the saints, "the church of God in Corinth," dealt in a large measure with the **divisions** and **schisms** among God's people there. In the first chapter he deals with this problem directly. (I Cor. 1:10-16). He told them that there should be "**no divisions** among you." The word "you" is used in the distributive sense, referring to each and every saint there as individuals. Perhaps his use of "no divisions" includes more than we have recognized or granted. It certainly forbids any **bad** divisions; but perhaps it includes **divisions** or **separations** that we think are desirable or necessary.

In verse 12, Paul illustrates the kind of divisions he means: "...*each one of you says, 'I am of Paul,' or 'I am of Apollos,' or 'I am of Cephas,' or 'I am of Christ.'*" Let me illustrate it graphically.

This illustrates the **divisions**, fragmenting, standing apart, walls, separations into apparently isolated, independent groups or "units." Look at their situation carefully. **THINK!** Paul asked, "*Is Christ divided?*" The answer is an emphatic "NO!" Christ is not divided. You are His body, and His body is **one**. Therefore, you should not be divided and separated one from another.

Now let me offer a possible parallel:

(1) Each unit above is said to be independent, autonomous, and equal. This is our teaching today.

(2) Each "local church" has its own membership list of those who belong exclusively to that formal organization. You can hear people claim to be "members of the Eastside Church of Christ;" for example, or of some other identifiable corporate church body. We never read in the New Testament about anyone being a "member of the church." **The disciples were NOT "members of the church" they were the church!**

(3) J.T.S. teaches, as do most of our professional preachers, that every Christian is required by God to "join or become a part of" some institutional church unit. Today we often hear of those who move from one church institution to another by doing what we call "placing their membership" or "identifying themselves with" the new corporate body. Some "move their membership" around rather frequently. We read nothing in the New Testament about such action! Often today one church in a city will "swell" its membership roll with an influx from other corporate churches.

(4) There is no real relationship or ties between these institutional units. Each one acts and does its own thing as if it was the only church institution in the world.

(5) There is usually a definite competitive spirit between and among these "local church" institutions. One will build at the expense of the others -- **proselyting!**

Now look back at the graphic representation of **divisions** among us and decide if this kind of **division** is from God or man. It should be understood that this is by no means the only kind of **divisions** we have. But the above is involved in all the others. What is the real difference, if any, between what we have in our separate, independent **divisions** called "local churches" and what Paul condemned in Corinth? Both are "divisions" of God's people!

Paul said to the saints at Corinth that he could not speak to them as *"spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ...for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and **divisions** among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' are you not carnal?"* (I Cor. 3:1-4). Paul emphatically calls their **divisions** -- **carnality**, or stemming from the flesh, not from God. Division among God's people is carnality; and carnality is sinful. Right? Is this true of **all divisions** among us?

Let me paraphrase Paul: "For you are...carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and **divisions** among you, are you not carnal? For where one says, 'I am of the Northside Church of Christ,' (division?) and another says, 'I am of the Southside Church of Christ' (another division?), are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?"

There is no concrete evidence that I can find in God's word for **dividing** God's people -- **the church** -- into independent, autonomous, isolated functional units or institutions such as we have today that we have named "the local church." There is no requirement from God for such. If so, where? Please consider seriously these matters in the light of divine truth. Are we following God or the ways of men?

Let us look at some other objections to "the local church" as a body corporate, institution, or organization as J.T.S. believes, teaches, and practices.

It must be understood also that when disciples do **constitute or form themselves** into such a **thing or entity or corporation**, that they **therein** lose their individual identity and individual responsibility! The organization or functional unit now takes charge. Whatever is done **now** is the work of "the local church" institution; **not** merely the work of individuals acting together. In J.T.S.'s proposition (No. 2), he claims that "every disciple of Christ is **required** to join (become a part of) such a **formal** organization and **therein serve under the control of the organization** in certain works that the disciples cannot do otherwise and please God." **Think** about that doctrine and its consequences. This means that once the disciples of Christ form or constitute themselves into "an organized, functional, institutional entity -- body corporate" they thereby surrender their individual identity and responsibility to that institution. This is the basis for our modern terminology such as "corporate worship," "corporate works," and "the work of the local church." This gives birth to the view that we are to do things "in the name of **the church**" and "let **the church** get the glory." Due credit must go to the Church of Christ Church!

Note carefully that the teaching is that there are "certain works" that the individual, acting as an individual, cannot do and please God! Also, whatever these "certain works" are, they cannot be done by **individuals acting together as individuals, or conjointly**, and please God! These "certain works" can only be performed by the "body corporate" or "unit" that the disciples must form or constitute themselves into! Only this institution can do these "certain, specific, clear-cut, authorized works...with God's approval:" Hence, this institution is absolutely essential if these "authorized works" are to be performed. Thus, the idea of "corporate worship" and "corporate works" that the "corporate body" controls.

In the discussion I offered a chart dealing with this vital point. It was under the heading: "From Heaven or From Men?"

In the New Testament there is no such thing as:

Corporate Action
Corporate Obedience
Corporate Responsibility

For the above concept, there is no -

Command

Example

Necessary Inference

The concept is from **MAN! (Rome!)** This was to focus on the fact that there is no such thing in the New Testament as a body corporate, institution, organization, or functional unit or entity -- in any shape, form or fashion!!

If there is corporate responsibility, then there must be corporate action, corporate obedience or disobedience.

If the above is true, then it must follow that there will be corporate **accountability**. Do you believe that "the local church" will stand before the Lord at the judgment, **as a corporate body**, to be judged? J.T.S. denies that there is corporate accountability, but contends for corporate responsibility, corporate action and corporate obedience. His proposition shows this to be his position. It states that "the local church" **is** an organized, functional, institutional entity (body corporate); [and] that **as such it has been given certain...authorized works to perform that only this unit can perform with God's approval...** That clearly teaches corporate responsibility -- assigned by God Himself! It demands **corporate obedience** or **corporate action** in performing these "authorized works that only this **unit** can perform with God's approval." Therefore, this means that these "works" are the exclusive "works" of the corporation! Yet J.T.S. would have us believe that there is no **corporate accountability! Responsibility**, yes; but **accountability**, no! The idea is ridiculous. Accountability, he tells us, for the **corporate** responsibility and "works" somehow falls back on the shoulders of the individuals who compose or constitute the corporate body. This means that the corporation -- "functional unit" assigned by God to perform these "works," is **NOT** the one **accountable** to God for doing or failing to do these works. The **responsible** "local church" institution is not accountable. He claims that accountability somehow falls upon each and every member for the performance of the institution; yet the members themselves have no voice or vote in what the corporate body does! The corporate body is under the absolute control of The Eldership, which, according to J.T.S., has "**divine authority**" to make all "the final decisions" for the corporate body. His proposition plainly says that "every disciple" **must** "serve under the control of the organization" and The Eldership controls the organization. The "organization" controls, meaning the "duly constituted officials" -- The Eldership -- but **you** are held accountable before God for what the corporate body does or does not do!

Do you believe all these assertions? Does it make sense to you? It can't, because it is a web of errors and inconsistencies. Yet this is the folly to which we have come with the denominational Church of Christ Church (institution) that is named "the local church."

"The Local Church"

In the debate I presented a chart designed to show what happens when an individual "joins" "the local church" institution. It covered the following points:

1. He/she loses -- gives up -- personal/individual responsibility as far as anything that "the local church" does. Remember, **you** are to "serve under the control of that formal organization." Your will, voice, or vote mean nothing. It is **the will** of The Eldership that rules. They are the official rulers with "divine authority" to make all the final decisions for the corporate body. **You decide nothing!** Your role is to attend the corporate meetings at the appointed times, at the appointed place, to engage in the appointed activities arranged for you. **You** have no voice -- no vote -- in anything!

2. **You** have no voice or vote in the actions/works of the organization. In some cases, you may be allowed to offer suggestions; but you are not involved in "the final decisions."

3. Everything done by this corporate body -- "the local church" institution -- is under the **control** and **direction**, under the **POWER and AUTHORITY** of **The Eldership**, the governing **Body** or Board of Directors of the corporation.

4. According to J.T.S., The Eldership, the Board of Directors of "the local church" institution --

- are "duly constituted **officials**"
- who "have **divine** authority"
- "to oversee that local church"
- "in all its functions"

5. That leaves **you** out -- exactly as the laity in the Catholic Church are left out in the operation of that institution. All responsibility rests upon The Eldership. **The body of elders** is the boss with no less than "**divine** authority" for making "**all** final decisions." The Roman Catholic Church claims no more for its ruling system/clergy.

6. Your role in "the local church" institution can be summed up in two words:

OBEY and PAY!!

Let it be clearly understood: There is no such teaching in God's word as "**corporate accountability.**" But neither is there any "**corporate responsibility.**" Therefore, there is no such thing as "**corporate works,**" "**corporate worship,**" or **corporate** anything else! The only "functional **unit**" that the Lord has is the **individual!** The individual is God's smallest, God's largest, and God's **only** "functioning unit." Jesus Christ, our Head and Ruler, has assigned responsibility only to the individual; and only the individual is accountable before God. At the judgment "*each one of us will give an account of himself unto God,*" (II Cor. 5:10). **You**, all alone before the Lord, will answer at the judgment. So **you** do have a voice and vote in what you will do in serving under the control of Jesus Christ. (See the excellent article in this issue on "[Individual Responsibility](#)" by Dusty Owens. He covers this matter in excellent fashion.)

J.T.S. does admit that "the local church" institution is "separate and distinct" from the individuals who compose it. That is, the institution has identity and character of its own. To put it another way, the disciples are required by God to form or constitute themselves into an **organization**; and to this organization God has assigned "certain works." Webster defines an "**organization**" as: "An entity. A **thing** considered as having **individual** existence, even though it is composed of many, **as opposed to simply working together in an orderly fashion.**" Please note that individuals working together in an orderly fashion do **not** thus form or constitute an organization! Therefore, they do not constitute "the local church" per his teaching. You must understand this vital difference. I am not opposed to disciples working together in an orderly fashion, using some systematic arrangement, to do the work of the Lord. Indeed they must do this. The New Testament is explicit at this point. The Hebrew writer wrote: "*Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together...*" (Heb. 10:24-25). They often got together and **as individuals** (and that is the key point that is missed -- it was **as individuals**, not a "corporate meeting") they prayed together, studied God's word together, observed the Lord's Supper together, and as needed, pooled financial resources for a **specific purpose** (as in Acts 11:29-30). When together they engaged in "*speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs...*" (Eph. 5:19). They would "*admonish one another,*" (Rom. 15:14). And even as a gathering of individual disciples, acting as individuals -- **each one** participating and involved they followed the instruction of Paul: "*In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are assembled...deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*" (I Cor. 5:4).

But none of the above, or anything else that the disciples did, in a gathered together capacity, **required** that they form or constitute themselves into an **institution** so that institution could perform these acts or even "control" such. J.T.S. admits that Christians can act together, as individuals, in doing God's will and **not** be "the local church." Therefore, "the local church" is of necessity something more or other than disciples or saints acting together in doing God's will.

Where is the requirement or pattern for "the local church"? In the discussion, J.T.S. did not produce it nor did he deal forthrightly with this matter. This was a real disappointment to me. You should secure the tapes and see for yourself if he did or did not produce the pattern or requirement from God to prove that the disciples of Christ **must themselves become an institution in order to obey God**. In simple terms, this is what he was to prove. That is basic to the issue between us.

In addition, J.T.S. took another astounding position. He argued -- clearly stating this more than once -- that if there is no such thing as "the local church" institution, The Eldership would not have anything to oversee or rule! Can you believe that a gospel preacher would preach such an assertion? Can you imagine anyone teaching such a concept? In line with his position and teaching, The Eldership is the equivalent of a Board of Directors over, ruling and running, a corporation or business. The Eldership is not, therefore, to "shepherd the sheep" except as "the sheep" form or constitute themselves into an organization he calls "the local church," so that The Eldership can "shepherd it."

This view of "the local church" and "The Eldership" as the governing Board of Directors exercising the authority of Christ, is relatively new in Churches of Christ. I have seen it develop within my lifetime. It is rapidly spreading and is becoming more fixed in all segments of the Church of Christ. If indeed there is such a thing as "the local church" **institution**, after the pattern of the denominations and the business institutions of the world, then there is a need for a Board of Directors to rule and run it! Isn't that easy to see and accept? But the concept is from man, not from God.

And we are beginning to reap the fruit from such an unscriptural concept and teaching. A classic case is in Little Rock where a deacon has gone to law to force The Eldership at the Sixth and Izard Church to "disclose" to the members there the financial status and holdings of "the local church" corporation! These overlords refuse to do so. The case is now before the Supreme Court of Arkansas and a decision is expected early next year. It is an important decision of tremendous precedent-setting dimensions.

I will more fully discuss the last two propositions concerning elders in the next issue. But it is important here that we recognize that according to J.T.S., and other preachers, if The Eldership is to oversee, rule and control an organization, it is necessary that the disciples form or constitute themselves into such an institution so The Eldership can do their work! That is a pitiful, sad, totally unscriptural and anti-scriptural concept and doctrine. It comes from Rome, not the New Testament. May God have mercy upon us!

There is much more that needs to be said, but I will let this suffice for now. This particular subject, and perhaps this phase of the debate itself, will be discussed more fully in coming issues of this magazine. J.T.S. and I will have another public discussion on the subjects here in Chattanooga, March 3-4, 6-7, 1986. You should plan to attend. Hopefully the issues involved, the real points of difference, along with the dangers relative to them, will become clearer to all as more study is done. We are not dealing with abuses, we are dealing with teachings and practice. These are matters of far-reaching consequences. Please study them with us. --C.A.H.