



Accents & Issues

Fraternal Orders

Brethren in Christ life and practice places maximum value on the person and teachings of Jesus Christ: “Therefore, involvement in organizations that divide the denominational family’s loyalty to, or conflicts with, Jesus Christ and the Church should be avoided.”¹ This wise counsel pertains especially to societies that require a covenant relationship. The Bible consistently expresses a perspective that people who belong to God should avoid joining themselves to those who do not. The apostle Paul very plainly told the believers in Corinth to not be bound together with unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14).

To the young minister Timothy, Paul also said, “Watch yourself, and your teaching” (1 Tim. 4:16). In saying that, he stresses the importance of following Jesus in both behavior and belief. One component of that mandate is the necessity of being selective in how and with whom we associate. The apostle is not suggesting that believers avoid all contact with nonbelievers. He says for such a thing to happen we would need to leave this world (1 Cor. 5:9-13). Nevertheless, he reminds us that God requires his children to live separated from ungodliness (2 Cor. 6:17). Therefore, considering the biblical instruction to watch both behavior and belief, as well as the prohibition of believers uniting themselves with unbelievers, it is expected that Christians will not become members of groups who behave badly or believe wrongly (1 Cor. 15:33).

Rather than try to list every known society, club, organization, order, lodge, etc., and attempt to categorize them into lists of *acceptable* or *unacceptable* for believers, the Brethren in Christ expectation is for members to exercise godly wisdom and discernment. Ask questions. Does this group require me to swear allegiance? If so, would this commitment divide or compete with my loyalty to Christ? Does this group behave in ways that are consistent with the pattern established by the life of Jesus? Does this group in any way undermine the truth that Jesus is both God and man and the only way of salvation?

Brethren in Christ members are counseled to not unite with fraternal organizations that do not pass the test of being sound in both lifestyle and teaching. Be alert to the fact that some groups excel in only one or the other. The requirement to be biblically acceptable, however, is for both aspects to be present and healthy. Do not compromise by rationalizing that good behavior overcomes bad teaching or that sound doctrine excuses bad behavior. Jesus very clearly stated that his followers, those whom he will recognize at the end of the age, are the ones who both accept his teaching and produce his fruit.

Our earnest desire as a faith-based community is to model in both word and deed a singular loyalty to Christ and his Church. Toward that end, we believe that the will of God is most reliably understood when we humbly examine the Bible together and allow the Holy Spirit to guide us as one body. Before entering significant alliances or endeavors, we think it is wise, both as individuals and as a spiritual family, to prayerfully consult with brothers and sisters who have wisdom, knowledge, experience, and maturity in the faith. This type of consultation is a biblical pattern that has served believers well throughout history. Therefore, we strongly encourage it as a normal part of maintaining good spiritual health.

1. Statements of Christian Life and Practice: Article 3.2, *2018 Manual of Doctrine and Government* (Brethren in Christ U.S., 2018), 20.