



Introducing the Church of Christ

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"I hear so many things about the different churches . . . And what about this 'church of Christ' group, who are they?"

Such are just a sample of the comments often heard when the conversation turns to religion. The problem comes in that when we ask these questions we get so many different answers! If you were to ask five people about the church of Christ, you would probably get five different answers. But there is a solution. If I want to know about any religious group, I should look to the book they follow, their "creed book." Where then should we look to find out about the church of Christ? The Bible. While you and I may have opinions about religion, there is only One who has the answer -- God, and He has revealed that truth to us in His Word (cf. John 8:32; Colossians 3:17). What then does God tell us of the church of Christ?

The Church of Christ Is . . . A Singular Body

While we are all familiar with the statement that we can "attend the church of our choice," such an idea is foreign to the Bible. When Jesus was speaking to His disciples He said, "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18). Notice that He did not say "churches" in support of the idea of many churches, but "church" as in one. We read in Ephesians 1:22-23 that Christ is "head over all things to the church, which is His body." Just three chapters later the same inspired writer informs us that "there is one body" (Ephesians 4:4). This makes it that much more important for us to look to the Bible and see what God has to say about the church, for if there is but one, we surely want to attend the church of *His choice!*

The Church of Christ Is . . . People

This may seem strange to say, but many people equate the church with the building the name is found upon. Many passages in the Bible clear up such misconceptions.

For example, in the book of Acts we read the following concerning the actions of Saul of Tarsus before he came to follow Christ: "*As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison*" (Acts 8:1-4). Note in the above text who it was that Saul persecuted. We are told first of all that Saul "made havock of the church," yet in the very same sentence we are told he was haling [or forcing] "men and women" to prison. What does this tell us? The "church" that was persecuted was the people, not some building or mystical body. The church is composed of people like you and I. It is plain though that not everyone is in the church of Christ -- Saul obviously was not at the time he was persecuting it. What then sets those apart who are in the church from those who are not?

The Church of Christ Is . . . People Who Belong To Christ

Remember back to the passage referred to above in Matthew when Christ spoke to His disciples about the church. He said, "I will build *my church*" (Matthew 16:18). Paul tells us the church was "purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). The question quickly comes to mind then, "How is it that one becomes Christ's?" For us to realize how one comes to belong to Christ, we again go to His Word. While the religious world gives many differing ideas as to how this happens, God has but one. In 1 Corinthians Paul addresses the problem of division. In verse ten we read that there were various claims as to who these people were "of" or belonging to. Some said "I am of Paul," others "I of Apollos." Still others claimed to be "of Cephas." There was one group though who said they were "of Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:12). The last is clearly the only correct claim. To settle the disputing and bring about the proper unity, Paul set forth a "test" of sorts to determine who one is "of." He said: "*Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?*" (1 Corinthians 1:13). The first question needs no answer, for we all realize that Christ is not divided! But how then to determine the true claim? Two points were made:

First, was the one you claim to be "of" crucified for you?

Secondly, were you baptized in the name of that person?

As to the first question, only Christ can make such a claim. He alone has been given for the sins of mankind (John 3:16; Romans 5:6-9). The second question makes plain something that many want to deny or disregard, but if God said it we have no right to do anything but accept it. That is, for one to be "of" another, or belong to him, he must be baptized in that person's name, or authority. Now while some dispute such, we again appeal to the Bible as the standard. Christ has made it plain in regard to baptism that:

It is a command of His (Matthew 28:18-20).

It is necessary for one to be saved (Mark 16:16).

It is necessary for one to have their sins remitted (Acts 2:38).

Those who "gladly received His word were baptized" and then "added to the church" (Acts 2:41, 47).

It is by this act that we are "in Christ" (Romans 6:3 and Galatians 3:27).

The point is that those who are "of Christ" must be baptized as He commanded. That means that based on our submission to His will to believe (John 8:24), repent (Luke 13:3), and confess Him before others (Matthew 10:32-33), we will continue our submission and be baptized in the manner and for the purpose Christ commands. The Bible tells us that it is then that we receive the great blessing of salvation. It is then that we can say we belong to Christ -- we are "of Christ." It is only then that one can rightly wear the wonderful name of "Christian."

Those in the church of Christ are those who belong to Christ, and they are willing to do whatever He has commanded to be partakers of such a great privilege.

The Church of Christ Is . . . People Who Love Christ and Follow His Commands

The idea of "doing something" is spoken against in many quarters. But God has much to say about the idea of doing things He has commanded. We are told very plainly that "Christ is the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him" (Hebrews 5:9). Some think that such obedience will negate the grace of God, but such an idea is foreign to the teachings found in His word. Instead of obedience being condemned it is called love. *"If ye love me, keep my commandments"* (John 14:15).

Those in Christ's church obey Him out of love. We realize that following His commands will not merit us salvation, for as Christ said, *"when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do"* (Luke 17:10). Those in the church of Christ obey Him, not to earn His love, but to show our love in return for His. We realize we could not even truthfully call Him "Lord" and not do the things He has said (Luke 6:46). It is for this reason that those in the church of Christ seek to do all "in the name of" or by the authority of Christ (Colossians 3:17). As a result you will

find many things different when you visit the worship services of the church of Christ.

You will hear the New Testament used as the authority for our actions and teachings. This is because the Old Testament was given as a "schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ" (Galatians 3:24) but when Christ came, He took the old law out of the way (Colossians 2:14). Of course the Old Testament is still valuable for our learning (1 Corinthians 15:4) and admonition (1 Corinthians 10:11), but we would not take it upon ourselves to try and justify our actions by a law Christ nailed to the cross (Galatians 5:4).

You will not find a mechanical instrument of music used in worship to God. The reason for such is that God has been very plain in saying that we are to sing (Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19). Since we have such love for Christ and His commands, we would not presume to add that which He has not authorized in worship to Him. After all, it was He who said our worship must be "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23-24).

You will see the observance of the Lord's Supper each first day of the week. The early church, as they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42), partook of the supper on the "first day of the week" (Acts 20:7). If we are to have the proper respect for the commands of God, how can we do differently?

You will notice that only men lead in the public services of the church. God has told us that He does not allow women to have authority over men (1 Timothy 2:12). This is not an insult to women, but simply respect for the commands of Christ whom we love.

These are some of the things people sometimes look to and wonder about when they consider the church of Christ. But the answer is very simple, the church of Christ is people who love Christ and follow His commands. As such, we must be as the early disciples who, when faced with the decision whether to follow the will of God or the things popular with man, proclaimed, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

The Church of Christ Is . . . People Who Desire That Others Share The Joy They Have In Christ

We have wanted to introduce you to the church of Christ, not just so you will understand us better, but in the hope that you will see a bit of the love we have for God and the joy we have in following His will. But more than that we want you to have that same joy. We want you to be able to joyfully proclaim with us the same

sentiment the apostle Paul had . . . "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2 Timothy 1:12). The apostle Paul loved Christ enough to commit his all to the Lord's keeping. He rejoiced in knowing that such a commitment was sure and stedfast as he approached the day of judgement. We in the church of Christ share that commitment and want you to be a part of the hope we have in Christ.

We hope you will allow us to help you in being a part of that one body which belongs to Christ and lovingly follows His will.

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