

What Is The Church Of Christ?

Only **Christ** has the authority to say what the church is and what Christians should teach. We believe the church today should be the same as that in the New Testament in organization, name, worship, law of conversion and in principles of Christian living. Members of the church of Christ realize their own personal weaknesses and shortcomings, but they believe that the **whole structure** of Christianity rests upon the **divinity** of Christ and His resurrection (I Corinthians 15:14).

Members of the church of Christ hold that the New Testament writers were **inspired** of God and believe, therefore, that the New Testament is true and contains the **final** and, **complete** revelation from God to man (John 16:13; II Timothy 3:16-17; Jude 3). Members of the church of Christ believe that the Old Testament was also inspired; however, that as a part of Gods eternal plan it was only a **preparation** or "tutor to bring us to Christ" (Galatians 3:24).

The New Testament teaches that the Old Law was "blotted out, taken out of the way, and nailed to the cross" (Colossians 2:14). When the Old Law was abolished the **new and better** covenant went into effect (Hebrews 8:6-7; 9:15-18). Following the New Testament as the rule of faith and practice and the Old Testament as example (Hebrews 8:5; Romans 15:4), members of the church of Christ purpose to speak where the **Bible** speaks and to be silent where it is silent.

Only the New Testament Serves as a Rule of Faith and Practice

We believe that to subscribe to any creed other than the New Testament, to refuse to obey any New Testament command, or to follow any practice not sustained by the New Testament, would be **adding to** or **taking from** the teachings of God (Galatians 1:8; Revelations 22:18-19).

The New Testament reveals that God has vested "all authority" in Christ (Matthew 28:18), and that Christ serves as God's spokesman today (Hebrews 1:1-2). Since the New Testament alone sets forth Christ's instruction to his disciples, it alone must serve as the basis for **all religious teaching and practice**. This is fundamental with members of the church of Christ. We believe that teaching the New Testament without modification is the **only way** to lead men and women to become Christians. The first members of the Lord's church accepted the apostle's teaching as infallible and final (Acts 2:42). However, before long some began to teach and practice things different from the apostle's teaching.

Such a departure from sound doctrine was forecast by New Testament writers in their **warnings** against digression (Acts 20:29-30). In spite of these injunctions, from the beginning of the second century through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, one departure after another followed until the church in organization, worship and teaching was **vastly different** from the church of the New Testament. History records that innovations introduced included: Church offices unauthorized in the Scriptures; the creation of a special clergy; religious councils to decide matters of organization, worship and doctrine; sprinkling substituted for immersion and the sprinkling of infants; and, the addition of instrumental music to the worship.

At the close of the Middle Ages, many religious leaders rebelled against the ecclesiastical **authority and practices** of the Roman church. They pleaded for the full authority of the **Bible** in matters of religion. Chief among these great men were, Martin Luther, John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli. Followers rallied around the reformers, and unfortunately their teachings eventually crystallized into **many creeds**. Thus followed the era of **denominationalism**, with different groups springing up everywhere, each with its peculiar name, organization, doctrine and practice.

In the late 1700's men of different denominations, studying independently of each other in various parts of the world, began to ask, "Why not go back **beyond** denominationalism and beyond Roman Catholicism to the **simplicity and purity** of the first century church? Why not take **the Bible alone** and once again continue "steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship" (Acts 2:42)? "Let us," they said, "plant the same seed (Luke 8: 11) that the apostles and first-century Christians planted, and let us be **Christians only**, as they were." These men pleaded with all others to throw off denominationalism, to throw away human creeds, and to follow the Bible. They taught that nothing should be required of people as acts of faith except that which is evident from the scriptures. They emphasized that **going back** to the Bible does not mean the establishment of another denomination, but rather a **return** to the original church. This, we believe is the only safe pattern. We humbly cherish the hope that we today are following this pattern set forth in the New Testament. It is our **only** rule of faith and practice.

Establishment of the Church of Christ

Members of the church of Christ contend that the church was established on the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ ... in A.D. 33 in the city of Jerusalem. The prophet Isaiah said: "And it shall come to pass in the latter days, that the mountain of Jehovah's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills and all the nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:2-3).

The expression, "Jehovah's house," refers to the church (I Timothy 3:15). **Every** phrase of Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled on Pentecost, the record of which is given in Acts 2. Isaiah said the church would be established in "the latter days." Peter, on Pentecost, referred to this time as being the "last days" (Acts 2:16-17). This marks the fulfillment of the first phase of the prophecy. Next, Isaiah said God's kingdom would extend its blessings to include "all nations." Acts 2:5 tells us that on Pentecost there were ". . . Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven." Acts 2:39 tells us that the new kingdom was for these Jews, and their children, and all that are afar off. The phrase "afar off" refers to the Gentiles (Ephesians 2:11-13).

Christ had also told His apostles that "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47).

During his earthly ministry, Christ declared, "the kingdom of God is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). "At hand" means imminent or nearby, but not an accomplished fact. When Jesus spoke the words of Matthew 16:18, "Upon this rock I will build (future tense) my church," the church was still in the

future. In Mark 9: 1, Jesus told them that the kingdom would be established during the lifetime of some of those to whom he was speaking. Jesus further said that the kingdom would come with power, and that the power would come when the **Holy Spirit** came upon the apostles (Acts 1:8).

Acts 2:1-4 reads, "And when the day of Pentecost was now come, they were all together in one place, And suddenly there came from heaven a sound as of the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them tongues parting asunder, like as of fire; and it sat upon each one of them. And they were all **filled** with the Holy Spirit. . . ."

Before the day of Pentecost all scriptural references to the establishment of the church indicate it as a **future** event, (Isaiah 2:2-4; Micah 4:1-2; Daniel 2:44; Matthew 3:1-2; Matthew 16:18; Mark 9:1; Matthew 6:9-10). **After** Pentecost the church is spoken of as an **established** institution (Acts 2:47; Colossians 1:13-14).

Name of the Church

The term, "church of Christ" is not used as a denominational appellation. It is simply a descriptive term indicating the fact that the church is the possession of Christ. This is not an exclusive term to designate the church, because the New Testament also refers to the church as: The church of the Lord (Acts 20:28); The body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:27); The house of God (I Timothy 3:15); The church of God (Galatians 1: 13); The church of the Firstborn (Hebrews 12:23). These are all terms which show possession. They point to the Lord as the owner of the church. Members of the church of Christ believe it right to wear a name which gives honor and glory to Christ. Salvation is in Christ's name (Acts 4:12), and we are to do all things in the name of the Christ (Colossians 3:16-17).

Organization of the Church

The church of Christ has no earthly headquarters, and no universal organization. Each congregation is autonomous or "self-ruled" and is independent of every other congregation. Churches may cooperate in the accomplishment of good works, but their autonomy is carefully maintained. We pray and believe that the organizational pattern of the church of Christ is divine in origin. Jesus Christ is recognized as the supreme ruler over the church (Colossians 1:18).

No fallible man serves as earthly head over the church. The sole unit of organization in the church of Christ is the local congregation. Each congregation is separate and independent in its government. Christ has delegated authority in the management of the local congregation to the elders, pastors, or bishops . . . three different terms referring to the same office (Acts 20:17, 28; Ephesians 4:1 1; I Timothy 3: 1; Titus 1:5). There is a plurality of elders in every congregation (Acts 11:30; 14:23). The qualifications for these men are described in I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. They have no authority over other congregations other than the one they serve.

The church of Christ also has a special group of men called deacons. They serve under the direction of the elders. Their qualifications are given in I Timothy 3:8-13.

The church of Christ also has men known as preachers (I Timothy 2:7), ministers (I Timothy 4:6), or evangelists (II Timothy 4:5). They likewise serve under the direction of the elders of the local congregation. We do not refer to our preachers with the term "Pastor," believing that this term as used in the New Testament refers to those men who have the oversight of the congregation. Neither do our preachers assume religious titles such as "Reverend," inasmuch as this term is used only one time in the Bible (Psalms 111:9), and in this instance refers to God. We believe the New Testament makes no distinction between so-called "clergy" and "laity," and that preachers are no more worthy of titles than other members of the church.

Worship in the Church of Christ

In John 4:24 we read, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." From this reading we learn three things: Our worship must be (1) directed to the right object - God. (2) It must be prompted by the right spirit. (3) It must be according to truth. To worship God according to truth is to worship Him according to His Word (John 17:17). We believe this means we must not exclude any item found in His Word. We also believe it means we must not include any item not found in His Word. We walk by faith in matters of religion (II Corinthians 5:7). Faith comes by hearing God's Word (Romans 10:17). Thus, anything not authorized by the Bible cannot be done by faith - and whatever is not of faith is sin (Romans 14:23).

We believe the Bible gives us instruction regarding five items of worship, and these we attempt to follow:

1. Teaching or preaching (Acts 2:42; 20:7).
2. Praying (Acts 2:42, I Corinthians 14:15; 1 Thessalonians 5:17).
3. Giving of our means. We do not teach the law of tithing, as we believe that it was nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14). We do believe, however, that we - who live under a better law with better promises, with our great prosperity - would consider it unthinkable to give less than 10 percent of our income to the Lord. We teach that members of the church are to give liberally and cheerfully (II Corinthians 16:2).
4. Singing. One of the things which people most frequently notice about the church of Christ is that we sing without the use of mechanical instruments of music.

I would be unfair to you if I failed to explain the reason for this. Simply stated, here is the reason: We feel we are to worship according to God's instructions in the New Testament. The New Testament leaves instrumental music out. We feel that, to use the mechanical instrument, we would have to do so without God's authority. We can read every verse in the New Testament on the subject of music in worship in a minute's time. Here they are: "When they had sung an hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives" (Matthew 26:30). "At midnight, Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises to God!" (Acts 16:25). "I will confess to thee among the Gentiles and sing unto thy name" (Romans 15:9). "I will sing with the spirit, I will sing with the understanding also" (I Corinthians 14:15). "Speaking to yourselves in psalms, and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:19). "Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Colossians 3:16). "In the midst of the church, I will sing thy praise" (Hebrews

2:12). "Is any merry, let him sing psalms" (James 5:13). We believe the mechanical instrument of music is conspicuously absent in these passages.

There are two kinds of commands given in the Bible: Generic and Specific. Note some examples: Build an ark (Generic; did not specify the tools to use). Naaman was told, Go dip in Jordan 7 times (Go is generic: did not specify how to go). Dip in Jordan 7 times (Specific - Had to be Jordan and had to be 7 times). Go into all the world (Generic: did not specify means of transportation). Preach the Gospel (Generic: did not specify how to preach - blackboard, radio, TV, written literature, etc.). The gospel (Specific: Eliminates preaching anything other than the gospel).

Music is a generic term, because there is more than one kind. If the Lord had commanded, "Make music," we could comply with the command by vocal, instrumental, or a combination of both. But singing is a specific term. Inasmuch as the scriptures all point to singing, this restricts the music to vocal. The first appearance of instrumental music in church worship was not until the sixth century A.D. There was no general practicing of it until after the eighth century. It has long been opposed by leading religionists. John Calvin, a great Protestant reformer and one of the founders of the Presbyterian church, said, "Musical instruments in celebrating the praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting up of lamps, and the restoration of the other shadows of the law" (Calvin's Commentary).

John Wesley, a great man, a Protestant reformer, and the founder of the Methodist church, when asked about the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship replied: "I have no opposition to the organ in our chapel provided it is neither seen nor heard" (Clark's Commentary, Vol. IV, p. 686).

Another great religious leader, Charles Spurgeon, who preached for 20 years in the Metropolitan Baptist Tabernacle in London, to ten thousand people every Sunday, never allowed mechanical instruments in his services. When asked why he did not use them he replied by quoting I Corinthians 14:15, "I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the understanding also; and I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the understanding also." Then he declared, "I would as soon pray to God with machinery as to sing to God with machinery."

Quite frankly, we who are members of the church of Christ are afraid to use the instrument because of the foregoing conclusions, and because of John's injunction: "Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God" (III John 9).

5. The Lord's Supper. This is a memorial inaugurated by Jesus Christ on the night of his betrayal (Matthew 26:26-28). It is observed by Christians in memory of the Lord's death (I Corinthians 10:24-25), and in communion of his blood and body (I Corinthians 10:16). Members of the church of Christ observe the Lord's Supper on the first day of every week. Such pattern is set by this New Testament example: "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached to them." (Acts 20:7).

Notice, they met on the first day of the week to observe the Lord's Supper. We believe just as often as they met on the first day of the week, just that often they observed the Supper. It is quite true that it doesn't say "the first day of every week." Neither were the Jews commanded to keep every Sabbath. Just, "remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8). They understood that "the Sabbath" meant every Sabbath. By the same token, we take "the first day of the week" to mean every first day of the week. Historians testify that the Lord's Supper was observed every Lord's Day. In his *History of The Christian Religion and The Church*, Neander wrote: "As we have already remarked, the celebration of the Lord's Supper was still held to constitute an essential part of divine worship on every Sunday, as appears from Justin Martyr (A.D. 150), and the whole church partook of the communion" (Vol. I, p. 332).

Eusebius, who has been called the father of ecclesiastical history, said: "From the beginning the Christians assembled on the first day of the week, called by them the Lord's Day, to read the Scriptures, to preach, and to celebrate the Lord's Supper."

Plan of Salvation

Members of the church of Christ believe there are certain steps which must be taken, in obedience to the commands of the New Testament. We believe that these steps bring about salvation and at the same time make one a member of the church.

Those steps are four in number: (1) Faith. This results from hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17) and is stated as essential to salvation (Mark 16:16; John 8:24; 20:30-31; Hebrews 11:6). (2) Repentance. This too, is commanded (Acts 2:38; 3:19). Repentance is a change of mind which causes one to turn away from sinful practices. It is commanded for everyone (Acts 17:30). (3) Confession. This is an outward confession of faith in Jesus as the Son of God (Matthew 10:32; Romans 10:9-10). (4) Baptism. Baptism is not taught by members of the church of Christ as a "church ordinance," but as a "command" of Christ. We believe the New Testament teaches baptism to be an act which is essential to salvation (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16).

We believe that proper subjects for baptism are: taught persons (Matthew 28:19); believing persons (Mark 16:16); penitent persons (Acts 2:38); persons who have confessed Jesus (Acts 8:37). We believe that scriptural baptism must be an immersion in water.

The Greek word from which the word baptize comes means "to dip, to immerse, to submerge, to plunge." The scriptures always point to baptism as a burial (Acts 8:35-39; Romans 6:34; Colossians 2:12).

We believe baptism is extremely important because the New Testament sets forth the following purposes for it: (1) It is to enter the kingdom (John 3:3-5); (2) It is to contact Christ's blood (Romans 6:3-4); (3) It is to get into Christ (Galatians 3:27); (4) It is for salvation (Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21); (5) It is for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38); (6) It is to wash away sins (Acts 22:16); (7) It is to get into the church (I Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 1:23).

Following obedience to these commands we believe it is important that the Christian live faithfully, because the Bible teaches the possibility of falling from the grace of God. Paul said he had to guard himself, lest after preaching to others he himself should be a castaway (I Corinthians 9:27). He warned the Christians at Corinth to take heed "lest they fall" (I Corinthians 10:12). He told some of the Galatians they had "fallen from grace" (Galatians 5:4). The Hebrew writer sounded the warning "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God" (Hebrews 6:4-6). Peter urged Christians to constantly add to their lives Christian virtues in order to make their calling and election sure (II Peter 1:5-10). He also spoke of those who had known Christ Jesus, but who had reverted to their old ways and said it would have been better for them never to have known the truth (II Peter 2:20-21).