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INTRODUCING THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

By Harold Turner

When a person is invited to attend a church of which he is not familiar, it is only natural that he wonder what the people are like who make up that church, and what their services are like. It is in view of this that we want to present this article to introduce some things about the church of Christ and hopefully answer some of the questions that you may have.

The Rule For Faith And Practice

Most churches have a manual containing their distinct set of church ordinances, covenants, creeds, and by-laws. Churches of Christ do not have or use such manuals. The only recognized standard of authority for what is taught, believed, and practiced is the Bible. We believe that the word of God contains everything necessary for our guidance unto salvation, Christian living, spiritual growth, worship, church organization, and eternal life. It is our belief that one should respect both what the Bible does and does not say. The silence of the Scriptures does not grant permission to do any and every thing that is not specifically forbidden. We believe that one should speak where the Bible speaks, and be silent where the Bible is silent, and that one should do Bible things in Bible ways, and call Bible things by Bible names.

Do the Scriptures support such a view? James 1:25 speaks of God's word being "*The perfect law of liberty.*" II Peter 1:3 tells us that his word contains "*All things that pertain unto life and godliness.*" Romans 1:16 tells us that the gospel is "*The power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes.*" Acts 20:32 states that God's word is "*Able to build you up, and give you an inheritance.*" And in II Timothy 3:16-17 Paul shows the all sufficiency of God's word, saying "*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect,*

thoroughly furnished unto all good works." These Scriptures, along with many others, show us that God's word is the only rule we need for our instruction and guidance in living the Christian life.

Since God's word is perfect and provides all the instruction we need, for what would we need a set of rules and by-laws for the church? Jesus said, "*In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*" (Matthew 15:9) This statement should be sufficient to show us the dangers of following what men have written for the church. Perhaps some may claim that the church manuals only contain interpretations of God's word, designed to help people with a better understanding of God's word. In the first place this is not true. Church manuals contain numerous rules that are not found in the Scriptures. But even if they did contain only interpretations, notice what the Bible says about interpretations, "*Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*" (II Peter 1:20-21). If the men who wrote the Bible were not permitted to write their interpretation of what God said, where do people get the idea that they have such a right today? God had the wisdom to say what he wanted us to understand. When men try to make some interpretation of it, they only mess it up and make it difficult to understand. We should not accept interpretations, or rules and regulations other than the Bible.

The Name For The Church

Every organization has a name to distinguish it from other similar organizations. There are literally hundreds of names distinguishing churches one from another. If one is willing to accept the Bible as his only authority for all things,

then it would seem that he would want to search the Scriptures for the name he wears religiously. Most churches are named after either their founder, or after some outstanding principle for which they are known. If we are identified by the founder, we honor and glorify him as such. Or if we are known by some outstanding principle, then we honor and exalt that principle by identifying with it.

The name we wear should be one that honors the one with whom we are identified. Jesus is the builder, owner, and foundation of his church. In Matthew 16:18 he said, "*I will build my church*". In Ephesians 5:25 Paul wrote, "*Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it*". Acts 20:28 tells us that Christ purchased the church with his own blood. And in I Corinthians 3:11 Paul said, "*For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*" Since the church belongs to Christ, having purchased it with his own blood, and since he is the foundation upon which the church is built, shouldn't it be identified with him in such a way as to honor and glorify his name? In Romans 16:16 Paul sent greetings from several congregations, saying, "*The churches of Christ salute you*". It is because of these principles that we choose to be identified as the church of Christ.

The Worship Of The Church

Since we believe that the Bible is the perfect will of God, containing guidance for all things in service to God, we believe that our worship should likewise be directed by God's word. The apostles were personally chosen by Jesus for the purpose of making known his will for his church. In Acts 1:2 we are told that after Jesus ascended back into heaven, "*he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen.*" He had promised them in John 14:26 and 16:13, that the Spirit would teach them

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all things, and guide them into all truth. These men set before the church the pattern of worship for all ages to come. There are five distinct actions expressed in this pattern. There was a period of study and meditation as God's word was taught (Acts 11:26; 20:7), they partook of the Lord's supper in memory of Christ's death for them (Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 11:23-25), they spent time in prayer (Acts 2:42; Ephesians 5:30), they expressed the joy of their hearts in praising God through singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16), and they contributed of their income to support the Lord's work (I Corinthians 16:1-2; II Corinthians 9:7). There are numerous other Scriptures to support these practices, but these are sufficient to show the pattern. In Acts 2:42 the Bible shows that they continued steadfastly in these. There are no other practices of worship taught in the New Testament.

Churches of Christ differ from most other churches in holding steadfastly to these practices without adding to or omitting from these. We do not light candles, burn incense, count beads or play mechanical music in worship because the Bible does not include these in Christian worship. These practices have been added by men. Another practice that is somewhat distinct from other churches is in the observance of the Lord's Supper each first day of the week. In Acts 20:7 the Bible states, "*And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them . . .*" It is our desire to follow the pattern set forth by the apostles as they were guided by the Holy Spirit.

The Organization Of The Church

Most churches adhere to church organization outside the local churches. There is no Biblical support for any organization outside the local church. In Bible times each congregation of the church was independently ruled by its own eldership. In Acts 14:23 the Bible states, "*They ordained them elders in every church.*" The men ordained to the eldership had to meet the qualifications set forth in I Timothy 3:1-7, and Titus 1:5-10. Only men could qualify for this work. These men had to be married and have faithful children, and to be recognized for their spiritual maturity and character. These men had the responsibility of overseeing the church, and helping each member with their needs (Acts 20:38; I Peter 5:14; Hebrews 13:17). These men oversee each function of the church to be sure that each function is in harmony with the Scriptures.

The Membership Of The Church

Among the churches of today there are various requirements to becoming a member of any one of them, and what makes one a member in one church does not make him a member in any other. Church "A" may require something entirely different than church "B" in order to become a member of that church.

The churches of Christ believe that the same thing that made members of the church in Bible times will make members of Christ's church today. To learn how to become a member in the Lord's church, we must again go back to God's word. Since Christ purchased the church with his own blood (Acts 20:38), we would not go back prior to his death to find the church, and thereby learn what to do in order to be a member of it. The church had its beginning as recorded in Acts 2. In Acts 2:47 we learn that "*The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.*" This shows that whenever one does what the Lord requires for salvation, the Lord will add that person to his church. In other words, the same thing that saves us also makes us a member of the Lord's church.

From the reading of Acts 2:36-41 we can learn exactly what these first members did in order to be saved, or to become members in the church. The first thing we notice from this reading is that they were taught the gospel of Christ, by which they were brought to believe that he was both Lord and Christ, and also that they

were guilty of sin. Upon learning this, they asked, "*Men and brethren, what shall we do?*" The realization of being lost should cause the same reaction today. Next, notice the answer these were given, "*Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*" To have their sins remitted, or forgiven, they were to repent, and be baptized. This would bring them into a saved state. Now notice verses 40-41, "*And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from the untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.*" So the same thing that saved these people also made them members of the church of Christ. They were saved by hearing the gospel, believing in Christ, repenting of their sins, and being baptized for the remission of sins. We believe that if we do the same thing today that those people did, we will receive the same blessing, and become members of the same church. No one has a right to require more for salvation and church membership than was required of people in Bible times.

Baptism

Baptism is administered by completely immersing the person in water. This action is based upon the Scriptures. In Romans 6:4-5, baptism is clearly pictured as an immersion; "*Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.*" We also have this same picture in Colossians 2:12, "*Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith in the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.*" This is seen in Acts 8:38-39. When the eunuch was baptized he went down into and came up out of the water. There is no support for sprinkling or pouring water upon the one to be baptized. We believe that baptism should be administered in the same way as it was in the Bible.

In the Bible record there is no reference made to the baptizing of babies or small infants. Baptism was administered to those who were old enough to be responsible for their actions. Those baptized in

the days of the apostles were first taught, they expressed their faith in Christ, repented of their sins, confessed before others their faith, and at this point were baptized into Christ for the remission of their sins. God's will has not changed, therefore, we must do the same today as those in Bible times.

CONCLUSION

Churches of Christ have for many years endeavored to go back to the Bible and work to restore the church as it was 2,000 years ago. We believe that this can be accomplished only when people are willing to accept nothing more or less than that taught within the Scriptures. It is our desire and plea that all who truly believe in Christ, and who desire to do his will, join us in this effort.

Sowing and Reaping

By Dean Fugett

There are many things that are hard to be understood in this life. A common frustration to the Christian is the fact that the evil element increases and their reward seems to be better than instead of worse than the lot of Christians. Many Christians, taking this limited view, cast their lot with the wicked - to eat, and be merry, to revel and enjoy. This shortsightedness shall be the downfall of many. Because we behold those within and without the church enjoy the pleasures of irresponsible living and we do not behold any travail in their lives, we ask, "Where is justice?" We cannot see the righteousness of God in this. This preoccupation with the here-and-now will be the condemnation of many Christians.

The truth of the matter needs to be told and heeded by Christians. The Preacher of Ecclesiastes says, "*Though a sinner do evil a hundred times and live a long life, I know it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before Him: But it shall not be well with the wicked.*" We need to be reminded that God does not forget and that He is not slack concerning His promises (II Peter 3:9). "*Be not deceived, God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap!*" (Galatians 6:7). We may not be present when God begins to see that the evil begin to reap what they have sown; or we may not have the wisdom to see that they are reaping a terrible harvest. Even though we may not be able

to see the final outcome, we must be willing to place our hope in God and "*walk by faith and not by sight.*" (II Cor. 5:7). The apostles had a better knowledge of the Will of God than we have, but we never find them bewailing their lot in life over and against the lot of the wicked. They KNEW that God is righteous and that He will recompense.

As Moses, we need to have respect to the recompense of reward and esteem the reproaches of Christ to be greater than the treasures of mammon and pleasure. May we truly see and comprehend the difference between joy and pleasure.

Can One Believe A Lie And Be Lost?

By Glynn V. Purdy

AN HONEST AND SINCERE PROPHET

After the tribes of Israel divided into two kingdoms, the kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Judah, the kingdom of Israel was led away from God by Jeroboam. Jeroboam set up a golden calf at Bethel and one at Dan; instructing the people that it was too much trouble for them to go to Jerusalem to worship, therefore it would be safe for them to worship these idols! At that time true worship for the Israelite had to be rendered in the city of Jerusalem, but these people thought that any place would be fine as long as the people were pleased. This sin cut the kingdom of Israel off from God, and from the kingdom of Judah!

GOD DID NOT IGNORE THIS SIN

Jeroboam made priest from tribes other than Levi and this too displeased God. So under these sinful conditions, God sent a prophet from Judah to condemn this practice. This prophet had specific instructions from God. Instructions which he both understood and with great integrity determined to follow at all cost. Jeroboam tried to compromise and bribe the prophet, but he would have no part of it! He informed Jeroboam, "*If thou wilt give me half thine house, I will not go with thee, neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this place: For so was it charged me by the word of the Lord, saying, Eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the same way that thou camest*", (I Kings 13:8-9). This prophet understood God's will and he was determined to OBEY GOD. So he completed

his mission, standing against all bribes and temptations and was ready to return home according to God's command. All looked well and promising for this prophet!

BUT HE RAN INTO A PROBLEM

There dwelt an old prophet in the land of Jeroboam. The young prophet got his orders from God and should have remembered that. The old prophet's sons saw what God did to Jeroboam's altar and heard the prophecy concerning the worship established by Jeroboam. They returned home and told their father. He instructed the sons to saddle his donkey and he went in search of the prophet of God. He found him sitting under an oak and invited him into his home. The prophet repeated what he had said to Jeroboam and refused to disobey God! The prophet of God, like so many today, was not prepared for the answer from the old prophet, a FALSE prophet. The old prophet said "*I am a prophet also as thou art; an angel spake unto me by the word of the Lord, saying, Bring him back with thee unto thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water. But he lied unto him*", (Verse 18). The Bible today was ONCE delivered, has everything to make a man perfect and God condemns all that will add to it or take away (Jude 3; II Timothy 3:16-17; Galatians 1:8-10). Even an angel which should preach another Gospel is condemned. Yet false teachers are claiming to see angels, Jesus, Mary, have dreams, etc., and thus draw millions away from the simple instructions FROM GOD, as how to be saved and worship God. BUT THEY LIE, (Revelation 2:2). We must TRY these false prophets today, for they are many, (I John 4:1-5). The young prophet believed this LIE, disobeyed God and returned home with the false prophet. Because he disobeyed God, he was not allowed to return home. He believed a lie and lost his life. I am sure he was honest and sincere!

CAN IT HAPPEN TODAY?

YES INDEED, IT CAN! "For after they have escaped the pollution of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ they are again entangled and overcome, the second state is worse with them than the first", (II Peter 2:20). "*And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they receive not the love of the truth that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them a strong delusion, that they should believe a lie;*

That they might be damned who believe not the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (II Thess. 2:8-10). When we read the Bible, we KNOW that this is God speaking to us. But we only have a man's word that he heard an angel, Jesus, etc. Even IF he did and the message is different than the Bible, it would be a lie and those who follow such teaching will be damned; lose their souls like the prophet lost his life when he believed a lie. The Bible is the standard of authority in all religious matters. If some claim to have seen something or had a vision, what good purpose could it serve. If he is told to ignore some of the Bible he is condemned and his followers. If he is told to add to the Bible, he is condemned and his followers. If he is told what is in the Bible, no useful purpose can be served. The writers of the Bible were inspired by God, we can trust them. Today, false teachers tell us, "But I am inspired too". Tell them that Jude said that the faith was "once delivered" and you do not care for "second" deliveries! Watch the false prophets who lie! Guard your soul, it is the only one you will ever have!

CONTRIBUTIONS

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"CREDIT WHERE CREDIT'S DUE"

In our last issue of the FCGN, November, 1983, there were two articles appearing on page two of that issue. One article entitled, "Truth Invites Investigation But Never Fears It!"; and the second article titled, "Can You Find It In God's Holy Word?" listed the author as Mike Pace. This was an error, as the author of both of these fine articles is Bro. Glynn V. Purdy, of Columbia, Louisiana. Sorry about the mistake Glynn, we'll try to be more accurate in the future!

How To Become A Christian

The most important question ever asked is: "*What must I do to be saved?*" (Acts 16:30). Then, the **HOW** becomes equally as important. Notice the step by step process. First, we must have faith in the Author and Finisher of our faith, Jesus Christ. (Heb. 12:2). This faith comes by the hearing of the Word of God. (Rom. 10:17). "*But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*" (Heb. 11:6). With the belief and trust that Jesus is the Redeemer, we must repent of sins. "*And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent.*" (Acts 17:30). In repentance, we turn from sin, **STOP** serving Satan and **START** serving the Lord. (Matt. 3:8,

Luke 13:3). With this new attitude we are ready to confess our faith, "*That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*" (Rom. 10:9-10). Read Matthew 10:32-33. Acknowledging our faith, repentance and confession, the last step into Christ is baptism. "*For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*" (Gal. 3:27). Read Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38. Now that our past sins have been forgiven, the Lord has added us to His church and we are Christians. (Acts 2:47; Acts 11:26).

BECOME A CHRISTIAN

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