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"The Churches of Christ Salute You"

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What Is The Church of Christ?

By Charles Coats

In this day of acceptance of almost everything, why is there a religious group that seemingly is very exclusive? This question, or one worded differently but with identical meaning, has been on the lips of many "religious" people. It is hard for some to imagine that there are actually some people who do not believe that all religious groups are acceptable in God's sight. It is also strange, to many, that this same group of people does not call its preachers by the terms "pastor" or "reverend." They also do not use instrumental music in their worship assemblies. Who are these people? Those who are members of the Lord's church - the church of Christ.

What is the church of Christ? To fully understand what this group is, one must consider the Biblical teaching concerning the church. Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, "And I say unto thee, That thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." It is interesting to note that Jesus said he would build only **ONE** church - "my church." Since this is the case, then obviously, all the religious division that we have on the earth today is wrong. Since only one is right, how do we determine which one is correct? It should be noted that this church is in existence today, and is not something to come many years from now (cf. Mark 9:1; Acts 2:47). Now, let us look at the identifying marks of the church.

FIRST, THE CHURCH JESUS ESTABLISHED WAS BEGUN IN JERUSALEM ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST ABOUT 33 A.D. In Luke 24:46-49, we find Jesus sending His apostles into Jerusalem to wait. In Acts 2, we find that the gospel message is preached and the saved are added to the church (vs. 47). From this time on, the church is in existence and soon goes into other parts of the world preaching the Word (Acts 8:1-4).

SECONDLY, THE CHURCH JESUS ESTABLISHED BASES ITS TEACHINGS AND PRACTICES ON THE BIBLE AND THE BIBLE ONLY. There are no man-made creeds or manuals or catechisms. Since the Bible is God's power to salvation (Rom. 1:16), then it alone is sufficient to guide mankind. Those who would use man-made creeds are worshipping God in vain (Matt. 15:9).

THIRDLY, THE CHURCH JESUS ESTABLISHED WORSHIPS GOD THE WAY HE DIRECTED US. Colossians 3:17 states: "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus giving thanks to God and the Father by him." Paul is exhorting the Colossian brethren to do everything they do and everything that they say "in the name of the Lord Jesus." This statement is the same as saying "Do it by the authority of Jesus." In other words, if we do not have the authority to do something, we should not do it. In matters of worship to God, we are authorized to worship God by teaching (Acts 20:7), by praying (1 Thessalonians 5:17), by giving of our means (1 Corinthians 16:1, 2), by partaking of the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:17ff), and by singing

(Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). In the matter of singing, we are authorized to "sing and make melody with our hearts." To make the melody with a piano, organ, or any other instrument is to go beyond what we are authorized to do. To go beyond God's Word places us in danger of Judgment (cf. Deuteronomy 12:32; Revelation 22:18, 19).

FOURTHLY, THE CHURCH WHICH JESUS ESTABLISHED IS ORGANIZED THE WAY GOD COMMANDED. It has as its head, Christ (Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:18). Under Christ is a group of men known as elders (Acts 14:23; 1 Timothy 3:1-9; Titus 1:5). It is noteworthy that there is to be a plurality of elders and never a "one-man rule." Next, we find deacons who are to help the elders (1 Tim. 3:10-13; Philippians 1:1). None of these men, nor any other Christian, is allowed by God to wear a religious title such as "pastor" or "reverend" (cf. Matthew 23:8-10). In Psalms 111:9 is the only time the word "reverend" appears in the Bible and it is applied to God. What man thinks that he is an equal to God and would dare to wear the term "Reverend" before his name? Truly, these people will be abased (Matthew 23:11, 12).

FIFTHLY, THE CHURCH JESUS ESTABLISHED SHOWS ITS LOVE TO GOD BY KEEPING HIS COMMANDMENTS. In the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus told His disciples to teach people to observe the things that he (Jesus) had taught them. Here, we see an early indication that Jesus expected people to follow His commands. Man has always claimed to love Jesus, but still, men

continued on page 2

FULTON COUNTY GOSPEL NEWS

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one true church. I hope that what I have said will cause someone to honestly look at his life and see the error of his ways before it is everlastingly too late. Please examine the scriptures cited herein and honestly evaluate the things that have been said.

CAN WE HAVE THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH TODAY?

By Jim O'Connor

“And I say also unto thee that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”
Matthew 16:18

A twentieth century reader, discovering this passage for the first time, may have questions generated by what our Saviour said. Did he build his church? If so, when? Does it exist today? If so, how? and where? If it does exist, can I be a member of it?

The answer to the first question is a strong “Yes”. Jesus does not make empty promises. If we think he does then the scriptures become useless to us, and we can have no confidence in anything he said. But he doesn't make empty promises, he built the church he promised to build. The church was established in Jerusalem on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2). Thereafter the church is spoken of as an existing, functioning, growing institution. It was blood bought (Acts 20:28), loved (Ephesians 5:25), Spirit inhabited (I Corinthians 3:16), persecuted (Acts 8:1), suffered for (Colossians 1:24), praised (1 Thessalonians 1:3), comforted (2 Thessalonians 1:6-9), and warned (Revelation 2:5). It was not a Jesus

of Nazareth fan club, nor was it a social club with religious rules. It was the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23), the saved (Acts 2:47), the household of God (Ephesians 2:19), existing for the purpose of preaching and serving, that God might be glorified (1 Peter 4:11, Matthew 5:16).

Does this church exist today? Certainly it does! Does Jesus still live (Hebrews 7:25, Revelation 1:18)? Does his blood still cleanse (1 John 1:7, Hebrews 10:12)? Does he still reign (Ephesians 5:23, 1 Corinthians 15:25-26)? Does he still care (Hebrews 13:5)? Do we still have his word (Matthew 24:35, 1 Peter 1:23-25)? You know the answers to these questions; and, in the light of those answers, doesn't it seem a bit ludicrous to ask if the church that existed in the first century can/does exist in the twentieth century?

Where is it? It exists anywhere that the word of God has been preached (Luke 8:11) and is being followed (2 John 9). It knows no racial, social, or gender barriers (Galatians 3:28), for “God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him” (Acts 10:34-35).

Can I be a member of it? Certainly! Anyone can! If you do what they did to become a Christian (Acts 2:38-41), and do what they did to remain faithful (1 John 1:7, 3 John 2-3), then it follows that you'll be what they were, and have what they had.

The New Testament scriptures reveal to us the nature, organization, worship, work, and purpose of the church. The scriptures haven't changed, nor has the nature, organization, worship, work, and purpose of the church changed. Those who would ridicule the idea of a first century church in the twentieth century do so out of ignorance. They do not understand the first century church, nor do they understand the needs of twentieth century

WHAT IS THE CHURCH OF CHRIST?

continued from page 1

want to do things their own way. But, Jesus said love is shown by keeping His commandments (John 14:15; 1 John 5:3). We cannot serve God and the world (Matthew 6:24).

SIXTHLY, THE CHURCH JESUS ESTABLISHED TEACHES PEOPLE HOW TO BE SAVED GOD'S WAY. Man says you can be saved on faith only or some other way. But, God has shown us another way - THE ONLY WAY - for man to be saved. The plan is simple and must be followed if any person is to be saved:

1. Hear the word of God (Romans 10:12-17).
2. Believe the word of God (Mark 16:16).
3. Repent of your sins (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38).
4. Confess the name of Christ (Acts 8:37; Romans 10:9, 10).
5. Be baptized (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 1 Peter 3:21).

Notice also, that entrance into Christ and His church is brought about by baptism (Galatians 3:27; 1 Corinthians 12:13). This is God's way and it is the only way (cf. John 14:6; Matthew 7:21,22).

Only the church of Christ can make the claim that it follows the pattern laid out by Jesus. It is the

man. Progress, so-called, has not brought a change in man's needs. We still need direction, forgiveness, comfort, hope - in short- we still need Christ!

Do not listen to the misguided advice of those who would seek to "modernize" the church to fit modern man. You cannot "update" that which is never out of date. Study the scriptures, obey what it tells you to do, and rejoice at being a part of a church that isn't subject to the whims of an unstable society.

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The True Meaning of Love

THE TRUE MEANING OF LOVE

By Garry Stanton

The word "love" is one of the most over-used, misused, and abused words in 20th Century man's vocabulary. The abuse of the word "love" has carried over into the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Many have taken up the "shield of love" to defend themselves against the truth. When the actions and/or teachings of a brother is questioned the "shield of love" is raised to ward off the attack. Is this a proper use of love? Is this the kind of love the Bible describes for the Christian? To answer these questions properly we must know the true meaning of love.

Some think that the true meaning of love is to overlook or ignore unrighteousness. Rubel Shelly wrote in 1973 that to some "Christianity is a kind of 'goeey' love that accepts falsehood and evil equally with truth and righteousness" (*The Spiritual Sword*, January 1973, p. 10). But Paul said that love "rejoiceth not in unrighteousness" (1 Corinthians

13:6). The realization of the nature and result of unrighteousness (sin, 1 John 5:17) should cause us to never rejoice in unrighteousness nor overlook it. Unrighteousness will be eternally punished as Paul affirms, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Romans 1:18). "But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, *shall be* indignation and wrath" (Romans 2:8). We should thank God that he loved us enough that he has warned us of unrighteousness so that we may repent. Likewise, true love will cause us to never ignore unrighteousness in those whom we love.

Still others say that the true meaning of love is to never rebuke those we love, and when a preacher or an eldership rebukes someone for sin it is not an act of love. Paul's explanation for the drastic action prescribed against the erring brother in 1 Corinthians 5 was for the sinners own good, "that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Corinthians 15:5). Later when the brother had repented, they were to *confirm their love* to him by forgiving him, comforting him, and accepting him back into fellowship (2 Corinthians 2:6-8). The idea that love never rebukes puts Paul in opposition to his own statements. In Ephesians 4:15 he says that truth is to be spoken with love and in 1 Corinthians 13:1 he says that if he speaks without love he is nothing more than "a tinkling cymbol." Later, he would command gospel preachers to "preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Timothy 4:2). If rebuking is a sign of the lack of love, then Paul is charging the gospel preacher to do something without love when he had already said that preaching must be done with love. Paul was not confused: the Holy Spirit was not confused: but, those who say that love never rebukes are confused. Paul faced some of the same

type of criticism during his day to which he replied, "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?" (Galatians 4:16).

Another mistaken concept concerning love is that love is only an attitude, that love for God is only an admiration for God, that love for Jesus Christ is only an appreciation for him, and that love for one another is simply an acceptance of one another, sin and all. Emotionalism and feelings are no substitute for true biblical love. That indescribable *feeling* in your heart may not be real love but merely heartburn. The true meaning of love is not in the saying but in the doing. We manifest our love by our actions for "this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments" (1 John 5:3). Even God's love for us is more than just saying he loves us for he *proved* his love by doing, he gave his only begotten Son (John 3:16). Likewise, our love for Jesus is forever established when we do what he says. Jesus said that "he that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me" (John 14:21).

Our love for the lost souls of the world is useless unless we demonstrate our love by doing. Your neighbor is standing in the way of a runaway truck. Do you prove your love for him by handing him a card that says, "I love you", or do you shove him out of the path of the truck? I am sure he would appreciate the shove much more than the card. Why can we not see this in the realm of spiritual dangers? To be injured spiritually or die spiritually is eons more worse than any physical difficulty (Matthew 10:28). Our friends and neighbors are standing in the path of sure destruction and we say we love them; yet we do nothing to help them out of the path of danger onto the pathway that leads to eternal life. What about the erring child of God? What is the loving thing to do, allow them to travel to their own destruction without lift-

continued on page 4

THE TRUE MEANING OF LOVE

continued from page 3

ing a hand to stop it, or go to them, point out the error of their way and encourage them to repent? The true act of love will be to help them rid their lives of their erring ways. Remember, "he which converted the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death" (James 5:20).

The true meaning of love is not only a lovely attitude but an *action* that seeks another's pleasure or well-being. We seek God's pleasure in obeying him. We seek man's well-being in teaching him the soul-saving gospel of Jesus Christ.

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IN NEED

See the long-haired youth riding his bike,
He is peddling down a lonesome pike.
Parental love is his craving need,
Instead he finds the sustaining "weed".

The far away look and the empty stares,
A boy in search of someone who cares.
He roams, he camps, traveling
here and there,
Looking for someone, his love to share.

His shabby, dirty clothes,
the pack on his back,
Symbols of rejections,
and the affection he lacks.
His saddened countenance
and his aimless cruise,
Reflects his thoughts - mother, father,
parties and booze.

Empty laughter echoing through his mind,
Sham and hypocrisy, signs of the time.
Would that his parents before its too late,
Awaken and save him from his
inevitable fate.

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The Church of Christ

1. The Bible is its only guide (Rom. 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical name (Rom. 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isa. 2:2, 3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matt. 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Eph. 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Heb. 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God's commands, including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Cor. 12:13).

God's Plan of Salvation

1. Hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Heb. 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Rom. 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Pet. 3:21; Rom. 6:3,4).
6. After 1 - 5, faithful Christian living (I Pet. 2:11, 12; Rev. 2:10).

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