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## The Doctrine of the Church

By Harold Turner

As one studies the distinctive characteristics about the churches of Christ, one of the most distinctive is the doctrine. Occasionally someone will ask to see our doctrine or creed book. When we reply that we have no such book, other than the Bible, they seem puzzled. Some just cannot understand how churches of Christ can preach, believe, and practice the same things apart from having a book of distinctive rules to govern the church. We are bound together by the same rule of faith that bound the churches of the Bible together. How did the churches of Galatia, Ephesus, Corinth, and other places preach, believe, and practice the same things?

In John 17:20-21, Jesus said, "Neither pray I for these (the apostles) alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." How could this unity be accomplished? How could believers all over the world be united in faith and practice?

Jesus selected a group of men known as the apostles, and through these men instructions would be given which could bind all believers in one united body. In John 16:13 Jesus promised the apostles, "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come." In Acts 1:2, after Jesus ascended back into heaven, the Bible states, "that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen." In Acts 2:4 the Bible states that after they received the Holy Spirit, "they began to speak . . . as the Spirit gave them utterance." The Spirit was the infallible guide, which would direct the apostles in all that they taught.

Upon receiving this message of the Spirit, they began both to preach it, and to write it for future generations. In Eph. 3:1-5 the apostle Paul said that he had received the message by revelation, and that he had written it so that when others read it they would know what had been revealed to him. In 1 Cor. 14:37 he declared that what he had written was the commandments of the Lord. The apostles were the selected agents through whom

Christ would make known his doctrine or will for the church.

How were the early Christians bound together as one in faith and practice? Acts 2:42 tells us that they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine. Did the apostles have a doctrine other than the doctrine of Christ? No. In Acts 4:20 they said, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." The doctrine taught by the apostles came from Christ. It was this doctrine that did, and can bind all together as one united body in Christ.

The Bible sets forth numerous warnings about religious doctrines. In 2 John 9-11 the Bible states, "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." This clearly places a boundary around what is to be taught and practiced as religious doctrine.

By what or whose authority would any church have to meet and design a doctrine to distinguish it from other churches? In Matt. 28:18 Jesus said that all authority had been given to him both in heaven and in earth. In Eph. 1:22-23 the Bible states that Jesus is the head over all things to the church, which is his body. If he has all authority, and is head over all things to the church, by whose authority do church counsels meet and devise doctrines that divide them from other religious groups?

Every religious organization is bound together and is distinct from all others by the peculiar doctrines that they hold. These are the causes for divisions, and can in no way help to promote the unity for which Jesus prayed in John 17:20-21. No matter how hard denominations try to love one another and overlook their differences, their different doctrines stand as barriers to separate them one from the other.

Just how serious is the matter of religious doctrines? In Matt. 15:9, Jesus said, "But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." Notice, they were worshipping the Lord, but their

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## Of the Church

By Coy Walters

The last temptation, which Jesus faced in the wilderness, was to fall down and worship Satan. The reply, which Jesus gave, was "Get thee hence Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." (Matt. 4:10). It is clear that we are expected to worship, and that the object of that worship must be our heavenly Father. Someone has said that all people worship something whether they realize it or not.

Worship has been defined as the response of the creature to the Creator. Webster defines worship as acts of reverence paid to a deity, or showing reverence for a deity. That deity must be our heavenly Father.

The psalmist gives us the purpose for worship when he writes, "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." (Psalm 29:2). Someone commenting on this passage notes that the primary purpose of worship is not that of receiving; but on the contrary, worship means giving to God that of which he is worthy, that of which is due him.

Someone may say, "Is all worship for this purpose?" In answer to this question Jesus has said, "But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." Here was a case where people were worshipping, and all indications are that this worship was directed to God, but it was in vain, it obviously did not bring glory to God. Why? Because in this worship they were teaching the commandments of men. The teaching that is to be used in worship, and that is to govern our worship, must be only that which is found in the doctrine of Christ - the New Testament.

In Acts 17:23 Paul remarks to the Athenians, "For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you." Here the people had become so idolatrous that they were worshipping all kinds of heathen gods, and in order not to leave any out they had an altar for the unknown God. The word ignorant means a lack of knowledge. This is not pleasing

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EDITORS: Erwin Cowen  
and Harrold Turner.

## OF THE CHURCH (Cont.)

to God. People can worship ignorantly today by a lack of knowledge in what the New Testament worship is and includes.

In Col. 2:23 there is mentioned a third kind of worship, "Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship." This is a self-imposed worship by the commandments and doctrines of men (Col. 2:22). This type of worship is also displeasing to God.

The three types of worship mentioned above are set forth as types of worship that displease God. Now let us consider the type of worship that is pleasing to Spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." True worship must be (1) directed to God, (2) in spirit, (3) and in truth. The first point has already been discussed above. From the second point people need to be aware of how important their attitude is in worship. Going to a worship service is not similar to going to a football game where you watch others perform and do not participate. If you go to worship to be entertained, you will be disappointed; if you go to criticize, you will find flaws; but if you go to worship God you will find rewarding values regardless of the architecture of the room or the subject of the sermon. Yes, it takes the proper attitude before an individual can engage in true worship.

The third thing that is essential in true worship is that it must be in truth. We have already observed that in the days of Christ and his apostles there were those who did not worship God in truth, but who followed the doctrines and commandments of men. Since we must worship God in truth, from where does this truth come? In John 17:17 Jesus shows that it is from the word of God. It is clear that we are not to worship by the pattern set forth in the Old Testament, but rather we are to follow the pattern set forth by Christ and the apostles. Any act of worship, which is designed by men, or any other act unauthorized by the New Testament is not in truth.

The worship of the church, as required in the New Testament, is as follows:

(1) Preaching or teaching the word of God - "And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ." (Acts 5:42). "And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people." (Acts 11:26). "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them..." (Acts 20:7).

(2) Singing - "I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the understanding also." (1 Cor. 14:15). "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and

spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." (Eph. 5:19). See also Col. 3:16 and Heb. 2:12. Notice that in none of the passages of the New Testament, which refer to the music in worship, are the use of mechanical instruments mentioned. Only vocal music is mentioned as a part of Christian worship. To use mechanical instruments in worship is to act beyond the authority of Christ. "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God." (2 John 9).

(3) Prayer - "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." (Acts 2:42). "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for the saints." (Eph. 6:18). "Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Eph. 5:20).

(4) The Lord's Supper or Communion - "And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you; this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you." (Luke 22:19-20). "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." (Acts 2:42). "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread..." (Acts 20:7). See also 1 Cor. 11:23-34.

(5) Giving - "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him..." (1 Cor. 16:2). "Every man according as he purposeth in his hearth, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver." (2 Cor. 9:7).

Members of the church of Christ seek to be Christians only. In so doing they seek to follow only what the New Testament teaches. Christ gave a pattern to guide us in the manner and way that we are to worship our God. He authorized no person or group of persons to alter, or to add other acts to worship. He warned in Matt. 15:9 that to do so made worship vain. We invite you to worship God with us the New Testament way, and to endeavor with us to follow only the New Testament in all things.

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## The Doctrine (Cont.)

worship was vain. Why? The doctrines of men had corrupted their worship. In 2 Tim. 4:3-4 another danger is sounded about religious doctrines - "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." Some willingly teach and follow that which is not truth. Yet, obviously, many among them would be unaware that these teachings and practices were false. In Acts 20:30 Paul spoke of some who would "arise speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." But, if one is sincere, and is misguided, will he be lost? Jesus said, "if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch." (Matt. 15:14). Some of the Christians in Galatia had turned from the true gospel, and thereby fallen from Grace (Gal. 1:6-9). Paul pleaded in 3:1, "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth." Someone had deceived them by false doctrine, and had caused them to fall from the grace of Christ.

The only safe doctrine for the church is the doctrine of Christ. The Bible pleads that we all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among us (1 Cor. 1:10). The Bible also commands, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God (1 Pet. 4:11).

Churches of Christ believe that everything taught and practiced must be supported by the Scriptures. We believe that Christ devised a doctrine that is all sufficient to save, promote unity among believers, and guide us in righteous living toward eternal life. In order for unity to exist, Christ alone must be the head of the church, and every doctrine that is of man must be abandoned. It certainly does make a difference what one believes and what one practices religiously.

# The Church of Christ

By Harold Turner

It has been nearly two thousand years since Jesus promised, "I will build my church." (Matt. 16:18). This promise became a reality upon the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ. About three thousand people were added by the Lord to this church the first day it was established (Acts 2:37-47). Acts 2:47 indicates that there were daily additions to the church. In Acts 4:4 we read where five thousand more heard the word and believed. The membership of the early church grew by multitudes. Within a few years the church had been established all over the then populated world. The grandest and most glorious institution that ever graced God's creation flourished into a mighty power. But is this great institution to be found today?

Amid the confusion of religious names, creeds, and doctrines there are honest people searching for the true church of Christ. Is their search in vain? If the true church exists, can it be identified today? Nearly every denomination claims either to be that true church, or to be a part of it.

Did Jesus give us marks of characteristics by which we might identify his church? If we go back to the beginning of the first church, and follow the pattern they followed, can we not be what they were? Jesus said that the seed of the kingdom was the word of God (Luke 8:11). If we plant the same seed today that the apostles planted in the first century will we not have the same product that the seed produced then? I hope that I will be able to challenge you in this study to give a diligent study of the church as revealed in the New Testament, and to cause you to compare the identifying marks of that church with the church of Christ of the twentieth century.

To begin with, let's go back to the beginning of the church. In Matt. 16:18 Jesus promised "I will build my church." This indicates that the church was not then present. The first record of the church being in existence is found in Acts 2:47, which states, "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." This shows the church in existence, the Lord adding the members to it, and the membership consisting of those who were being saved. A close look at Acts 2:37-47 will show that the same thing that saved these people also made them members of the Lord's church. How did it begin, and what did these people do to become members of the church?

First the seed was planted. As Jesus had said, the seed is the word of God, and the soil into which it was planted was the

heart of man. Acts 2:37 states, "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their hearts, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" The seed had been sown, it had pricked the hearts of these, and they are now concerned about what to do.

The apostle Peter answered their question, "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." Peter went on "And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." Here we see that by repenting of their sins and being baptized they would receive remission of sins, or salvation, the gift of the Holy Ghost, and would be added to the church. "And the Lord added daily to the church such as should be saved." (Acts 2:47).

If people became members of the first church of Christ this way, is not the same true for us today? If we do as they did, will we not become members of the same thing they did?

You might notice that these people were not saved and then told to join some church. Their salvation made them members in Christ's church. The same is true today. When one joins some denominational church, he must do something more than these did in Acts 2:47. There was no church joining in the first century for there was but one church, and Christ built it by adding the members to it himself.

The church consists of the people that have been saved by Christ (Acts 2:37-47). The church is what Jesus purchased with his blood (Acts 20:28). The church is what Jesus gave himself for (Eph. 5:25).

A second thing we learn about the early church as we study the Bible pattern is the worship. Acts 2:42 tells us that after these were saved, or became members in the church, that they "continued stedfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. The early church came together upon the first day of the week to keep the memorial supper of the Lord (Acts 20:7). They had preaching or teaching of God's word (Acts 11:26, 20:7). They gave of their means as God had prospered them (1 Cor. 16:1-2). They prayed together, and they sang without the accompaniment of mechanical instruments (Eph. 5:19, Col.

3:16). These five acts of worship were kept stedfastly by the early church with the admonition not to forsake the assembling of themselves together (Heb. 10:25).

If we worship in the same manner as did they, doing the same things they were instructed to do, neither adding to or taking from, will not our worship also be acceptable to God?

Another identifying mark of the New Testament church was the manner in which it was organized. Each local congregation was self ruled under a plurality of elders (Acts 14:23, 20:17-28). There were no super-structure as seen in the denominational organization of modern day churches.

The only rule of faith and practice by these early Christians was the word of God, which the apostles had delivered to them (Acts 2:42, 1:2). There were no man written creeds or doctrines to interpret the simple message of Christ. They believed in the all-sufficiency of the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Another thing peculiar about these of the early church was the name they wore. They wore proudly the name of their Saviour, the name He gave them - Christian (Isa. 56:5, Acts 11:26). It was in the name Christian that they glorified God (1 Pet. 4:16). Even their enemies recognized them by this name (Acts 26:28). Since the church is the bride of Christ (Rom. 7:4, Eph. 5:25-33) how could she honor her husband in wearing some man-made name? Would you be honored if your wife chose to wear the name of another man above or before your name?

One other identifying mark of the church is its mission. Jesus sent the apostles "into all the world" to "preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:15). The reason for this mission was to bring to the lost world a message instructing them in the way of salvation. According to Matt. 28:19-20 this commission to the apostles was to be perpetually carried on by those whom they taught and baptized. Hence the mission of the church is the mission of Christ to "seek and to save that which is lost." (Luke 19:10). This mission is to be carried on by each member of the church. (Acts 8:1-4, Heb. 5:11-14).

The true church of Christ is clearly identified by the pattern given in the New Testament. These identifying marks must be studied and compared with what we find today. Study carefully the conditions required for membership, the pattern of worship, the system of

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# The Government of the Church

By Clovis Ragsdale

For all things that God created, he established laws to govern their existence. The many laws of nature were given to govern and direct the instincts of the animal life. Too, God established laws to govern the courses of the sun, moon, and stars.

If would stand to reason that the church, which God ordained, and Christ came to earth to establish, would need a system of government to direct and control it.

Since Christ is the head over all things to the church, we would expect to look to him for the instructions concerning the government of the church.

Just before ascending back to heaven, Jesus called his apostles to his side, and gave them the great commission of taking his instructions to the whole world. He informed them that the Holy Spirit would come unto them, and guide them in all things necessary for this mission. The objective of this message was the establishment of the church.

In Acts two we see this promise of Jesus coming about. The apostles are filled with the Holy Spirit. They preach a message, which convicts the hearts of about three thousand people, who upon their obedience to this message were added to the church. Here we have the beginning of, or establishment of the first church.

Shortly after the church was established, local congregations were established in cities all over the world. After these congregations were established, the apostles set forth the system of government to oversee the welfare of the church. In Acts 14:23 we learn that "they had ordained elders in every church." The elders were charged with the oversight of the congregation in which they were appointed. This is evident from Acts 20:17, 28 which states, "And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church." Paul then gave them the charge, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." The elders were to oversee and to feed the church. Overseer, as used here, is from the same Greek word that bishop is translated - 'episkopos'. The word 'feed', as used here, is from the Greek work 'poimaino', which is the same word from which 'pastors' is translated in Eph. 4:11. Here we have three terms applied to the same men. They are called elders, bishops or overseers, and feeders or pastors of the flock. These three terms describe the kind of men these are, and the work they are to do. The term elder refers to men of

experience and spiritual maturity. The term bishop refers to their work in overseeing and directing the church. Feeding the flock refers again to the work of shepherding or pastoring, which involves teaching and protecting the flock from false teachers.

Each congregation was to have a plurality of elders, as is seen from Acts 14:23, Phil. 1:1, Acts 20:17, 1 Tim. 5:17, Titus 1:5, Heb. 13:7, 17, and 1 Peter 5:1. Never in the New Testament does the Bible speak of one elder, bishop, or pastor being over a congregation. In Acts 14:23 they "ordained elders in every church." In Titus 1:5 Paul left Titus in Crete that he should "set in order the things that were wanting, and ordain elders in every city."

In 1 Timothy 3:1-7, and in Titus 1:5-9 the qualifications are given for the men who are appointed to this work.

Too, in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 the qualifications are given for the deacons of the church. The office of a deacon is that of a special servant of the church. The deacons work under the oversight of the elders, and are to assist the elders in taking care of the various tasks of the church, such as caring for the needy (Acts 6:1-6), or whatever the bishops delegate for them to do. The work of deacons is not that of overseeing the church, and their qualifications are not as great as that required for the elders.

In conclusion, Christ is the head over all things to the church. His chosen apostles, inspired by the Holy Spirit, gave the instructions of Christ for the church (Acts 1:2). The apostles were the chosen witnesses and ambassadors for Christ. Each congregation is to appoint qualified men for the governing body of the church. Deacons are appointed as special servants to the elders and the church. This is the only type of government that Christ gave for his church. There is no higher order of government, such as a pope, college of Cardinals, Synods, Conventions, Associations, and etc. designed to oversee several or all the local congregations. Scripturally each local congregation is self ruled by the local form of government. There is no instructions for any form of government outside the local congregation. This government is within the eldership, not by the majority vote of the congregation, nor by a pastor, or board of deacons.

Any system or means of government other than that set forth by the apostles is not Scriptural. Only the system of government, as authorized by Christ, can direct the affairs of the church in a way that is pleasing to God.

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## The Church of Christ (Cont.)

government, the rule of faith and practice, the name, and the mission. Compare these with the churches with which you are most familiar, and I would like to invite you to make a careful study of these in the churches of Christ today. I am not asking that you examine the individual lives of the members for flaws, but for you to examine the pattern of the church revealed in the New Testament with the churches of Christ today. I believe that you will find that the pattern is the same today as it was in the first century. And, if you find it to be the same, I would like to invite you to become a member of the congregation in your community. You can do this by doing exactly what those did in Acts 2:37-47.

Why is this so important? What difference does it make what church one belongs to? Jesus said that he would build his church. To this church, and this church only, he adds such as should be saved. Only the saved will be granted the blessing of spending eternity with the Saviour. This makes it vitally important that we belong to the right church.

Clovis Ragsdale  
Route 3  
Marmoth Spring, Arkansas