

In the scriptures, when the Lord spoke about His church, he was referring not to manmade denominations, but to the church Jesus promised to build (Matthew 16:18)

The church Jesus built is neither Catholic nor Protestant, but truly *Christian* (Acts 11:26)

This divine church is built on the foundation of Jesus and his apostles It teaches only what *the Bible* teaches (Ephesians 2:19-21)

God's church is 2,000 years old! It began on the Day of Pentecost, 30 AD (Acts 2:47)

Jesus (fully God, fully man) is Head of the church. You can read about God's original pattern for the church of Christ in the Bible (Matthew 28:18-20; Ephesians 5:23)

Jesus alone determines what the Church should *stand for* (2 Timothy 3:15; 2 John 9-11). Man-made traditions have no place in its teachings. Attempts to twist the Scriptures have resulted in confusion, disappointment, despair and even complete loss of faith.

One cannot "join" the Lord's church, but the Lord will "add" you to his spiritual body when you make your freewill decision to repent and be baptized (Acts 2:36-38)

The *Bible* is the *only book* you need. God's word is the "seed" of his kingdom (Luke 8:11). Read it for yourself; plant gospel messages in your heart. Become obedient to its teaching, including baptism (immersion). Thousands, even millions, have done that. They have been set free from the guilt of sin and become part of the Body of Christ.

Churches of Christ today seek to be like the Church of Christ built by Jesus. Would you like to know more? Send an e-mail: (christfortoday@gmail.com) or leave your phone message: (860-355-0489)

> —David Tarbet, Outreach Minister **Church of Christ New Milford, Connecticut**

# **Built Upon Jesus, the Rock**

There is a well-known theory in construction regarding the foundation for a structure. That theory involves knowing the weight of a structure and understanding the types of soil it is going to be built upon. You cannot adequately build a proper structure without the knowledge of these two fundamentals. All engineers agree that building on bedrock (a large mass of rock) is the strongest material anyone can build upon.

Did you ever think for a moment that Jesus was the engineer of His church? He completely understood the enormity of the weight it would bear; what strong winds of persecution might press upon it; what rains and snows of trouble and false doctrine might damage the structure of the church.

"Jesus asked his disciples, 'Who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Then Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.'" (Mathew 16:13-19)

Some people think the church was built upon Peter. But let us look at the context. Jesus asked Peter who he believed the Son of Man to be. Peter answered: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus praised Peter for the correct answer, and said God Himself had revealed the true answer to Peter! Then Jesus made an important announcement: "You are *Peter*" (a masculine word, **Petros**, in New Testament Greek meaning a *small rock*, that could be thrown) and that His church would be built upon "this rock" (a Greek word, **Petra**, a feminine word meaning a massive bedrock). The church was not built upon the poor foundation of a man whose name meant a rock that could be thrown, but upon the massive, solid foundation bedrock truth Peter had just confessed: that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God!

Jesus Christ is "the word" who was God (John 1:1). He is the one everyone should honor "just as" (in the same way) they honor the Father (John 5:23). He is the one whom Thomas declared to be "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). The Bible says He is "our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). Jesus, the foundation of the Lord's church, was more than just a good man; more than an angel; more than a prophet. He was and is God the Son who came to earth to make the Father known (John 1:18).

### **Churches of Christ**

# BACK TO THE BIBLE

I remember reading the assembly instructions as a kid for something my dad was putting together and was told that we didn't need them. A handful of screws when the contraption was built were dismissed with the explanation that companies always put in extras. The product worked, yes, but not like it should.

The Manufacturer of mankind has left us a manual, God's Word, the Bible. So, it would make sense to follow the guidelines set forth by the One who designed us, created every cell, breathed life into us, and planned works for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). Jesus came to give us abundant life (John 10:10). Underscoring its importance, Jesus asked: "Have you not read ...?" He was bringing listeners back to the Bible.

Now I know that each of us can point to neighbors and friends who have never followed the Bible or perhaps live its precepts in a randomized way, picking and choosing tasty tidbits like dishes on a buffet, and they all seem to have pretty good lives.

But, do they really? Even though I ministered to others from the Bible, I realized quickly that I had a compromised version of my Christianity early in my wife's ongoing eight-year battle with cancer—but especially in the past six months. My foundation



of faith was not as solid as it needed to be to endure the trials that forced us to live separately since January and unable to help each other with the other's battle front.

Just as Moses was told to build everything according to the pattern shown to him on the mountain (Hebrews 8:5), I dug deep to return to the Bible to build up my prayer life and trust in Him. Reasoning that God, who loved us was working for our good (Romans 8:28). He was entirely in control of the circumstances, I have flourished in my faith where many believed I should have floundered.

I found the church which teaches only what I can read in my Bible.

'Back to the Bible' is more than just an academic exercise or pithy saying. It is a deep and determined commitment to delve into truths that save and enrich life. It will fortify your faith so that you may function well in the best of times and be prepared to endure the worst.

## A CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

A worldview is how someone understands and interprets the world. For example, my worldview contains the idea that humans cannot fly. Therefore, I won't jump out of an airplane without a proper suit. Everyday I see evidence of the laws of God and nature. My worldview strengthens my understanding of life's purpose and future destiny.

### **HUMANIST WORLDVIEW**

The <u>Humanist Manifesto III</u> defines humanism as "a progressive philosophy of life that, without supernaturalism, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good of humanity." There are two key points to notice. "*Progressive*" implies that there are no absolutes, that the purpose of life will always be in flux. "*Without supernaturalism*" implies that there is no Creator, no God, to whom we must give account.

### **CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW**

Christianity, on the other hand, is founded on the premise, "In the beginning God..." (Genesis 1.1). All tenets of Christianity are derived from an unchanging, all-knowing God who created everything in a supernatural way. While the Humanist Manifesto aims for lofty ideals concerning happiness, relationships, and the well-being of all, the Christian worldview reflects the danger of forgetting God. While Paul was describing people who "did not honor him as God or give thanks to him," he illustrated how God gave them over to "a debased mind to do what ought not to be done" (Romans 1:21, 28).

The Christian worldview claims that God intervened in this world through the life and sacrifice of His Son, Jesus. Jesus' life and teaching provide an unchanging moral guide for life. His sacrifice on a cross and subsequent resurrection provide a basis for life beyond this world. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14.6). Christianity provides what humanism cannot. God wants us to find our purpose through Him because He alone is qualified to provide it. No wonder the psalmist said: "The fool says in his heart 'there is no God'" (Psalm 14:1).

Members of Churches of Christ believe that God exists; that He created the world and all that is in it; that He sent His Son to teach us about our heavenly Father and to die on the cross for our sins. We believe Jesus rose from the dead. Life has a divine purpose: to please God, to conform our goals to the things God knows are in our best interest and will lead us to eternal happiness in the world to come.

### **Churches of Christ**



# UNDENOMINATIONAL CHRISTIANS

Can you imagine a world without Christian denominations? It stretches the imagination a little, of course; but Jesus did. He envisioned no Catholic, nor Protestant churches, just "the church". Truly united, undenominational Christianity is exactly what Jesus had in mind when He promised to build His church.

Denominationalism is by definition about Christian division. In America alone, there are over 300 denominations, causing many a seeker to give up hope of ever finding the right church.

Contrast denominationalism to Jesus' prayer found in John 17:20, 21:

"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

The unity Jesus prayed for was not "unity in diversity," but rather "...that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you...." The unity of Christianity was intended to be a reflection of the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in whom there is no difference of doctrine, morality, or interpretation of truth. They are truly one, just as Deuteronomy 6:4 says: "The Lord our God, the Lord is one."

Denominationalism wasn't what the apostle Paul's God-breathed letter to the Ephesians church had in mind either. "There is one body and one Spirit--just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call-- one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:4-6) The oneness expected of the church, of Christian hope, of Christian faith, and of Christian baptism is to be like the oneness of God Himself.

The Church of Christ is undenominational. It rejects the legitimacy of man-made divisions along with man-made doctrines, names, creeds and practices. It is composed of Christians who simply look to the Bible and become Christians by obeying biblical commands and examples for becoming Christians.

You can search the whole Bible and never find instructions for a Protestant Church or Catholic Church, nor any denomination. You will only find the pattern of Jesus' original, undenominational church. You can be a Christian without ever becoming part of a denomination. Keep searching until you find the church Jesus established!

# "YOU ARE SOMEBODY IMPORTANT, I PROMISE!"

Here's a promise each of us needs to believe and receive: You are important to God!

The fact that each of us is special begins with our very creation. We all are created in God's image, for God's glory. Genesis 1:26 says: "Let us make human beings in our image, according to our likeness." We are valuable to God. And there is no exception to this promise. Every man and woman, child or adult, rich or poor, urban or rural, black, brown or white, married or single is made in the image of God. We are not accidents or flukes of genetics or evolution. Here's something else you need to know: your value in God's eyes will never change.

God considers mankind so valuable that he sent his one and only Son into the world to pay the price for our sins (John 3:16). God's desire for all of us is that we allow God to do His ongoing work of shaping us more and more into his image. The more we fellowship with God, read his Word, obey his commands, and seek to reflect his character, the more something wonderful will begin to happen!

When one becomes a Christian he is forgiven of all his sins, and becomes part of the Lord's spiritual Body. Every member of the Lord's church is given "gifts of grace" (1 Corinthians 12:12-23). These gifts strengthen and build us up. Just as the human body has ears, feet, hands and other parts, so each part of Christ's spiritual body (the church) has its own distinct function and purpose. Paul's final point is that "the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable." The Bible speaks of the special connections Christians have in the Body of Christ. Notice the phrase "one another" in these scriptures:

"Love one another" (John 13:34-35)

"Honor one another above yourselves" (Romans 12:10)

"Live in harmony with one another" (Romans 12:16)

"Serve one another in love." (Galatians 5:13)

"Be kind and compassionate to one another" (Ephesians 4:32)

Every person deserves to be treated with dignity and respect; to be valued and loved. Racism cannot flourish when people believe their neighbor bears God's image. God loves us all with an unconditional, everlasting love. God invites you to share this is the kind of fellowship. You will find a welcome at the Church of Christ in your community; a new spiritual family!

## SIMPLICITY IN WORSHIP

In 1927, the Simplicity Pattern Company began its business of making clothing patterns, which allowed both the rich or poor to make clothing themselves. During the Great Depression many families made clothing from those patterns.

It is interesting over these last few months of dealing with the COVID-19 how simple things have become difficult to accomplish. Such as shopping for "non-essential" items, gathering in public, visiting friends and attending family celebrations. We have seen the importance of simplicity as real and necessary.

Jesus said: "...true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:23-24). Christian worship should never be about worshipers being entertained, but worshipers pleasing God.

In the Bible the Lord commanded the kind of worship that pleases him . True worshipers must worship in "spirit" (with right attitudes) and "truth" (according to the Scriptures—God's word of truth.) Worship on Sunday, the first day of the week (Acts 20:7) includes these activities:

- 1. **Singing** psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Ephesians 5:19). Worship as Jesus planned it, included "a cappella" singing (without musical accompaniment).
- 2. **Prayer** expressing our needs and thanksgivings to God (Philippians 4:5-7).
- 3. **Communion** (the Lord's Supper) taken in memory of Jesus' death (Luke 22:19). The bread represents His body and the fruit of the vine represents His blood.
- 4. **Contributing** our financial offerings to promote preaching the gospel and building up his body—the church (1 Corinthians 16:1-2).
- 5. **Teaching/preaching** the word of God (Acts 2:36-47).

As with following a pattern to produce an article of clothing, so following the New Testament pattern for worship enables Christians to bring simple worship to God. This is worship that pleases our heavenly Father.

— Gary Babock, Minister Kent County Church of Christ Coventry, Rhode Island



Congregational Prayer







**Singing Hymns** 

**Prayer** 

**Preaching the Word** 

The Offering

Communion

### **Churches of Christ**



# GOD'S UNCHANGING WORD

We are living in a society that has a hard time dealing with rules and authority. Most look at laws (like the speed limit) as suggestions rather than legal requirements. Attitudes that do not take authority seriously are not limited to secular life. It has filtered over to beliefs about God and the Bible as well.

The Bible needs to be regarded as the Word of God. It is not a book of legends and suggestions. It is the history of God and His people; the teachings of the Creator, the Lord and Savior of all mankind. The apostle Paul instructed Timothy: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

We understand the importance of absolute truth and send our kids to school to learn truth. We expect them to be taught that 2+2 equals 4; that the first president of the United States was George Washington. These are absolute truths. Equally so, God has given us the Bible as his Holy Scriptures. We are not to pick and choose verses we want to follow, but to learn how to understand God, and how to treat one another.

Scripture is the bedrock on which we can build our relationships and lives. Scripture does not change with the passing of time or the current fads, anymore than 2+2 will someday equal 5! While we experience the ups and downs of life, God offers an unchanging rock to hold to and stand upon. The Bible is unique: "no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was never produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:20-21).

Jesus said: "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth" (John17:17). When you visit the Church of Christ you will hear only what the Word of God teaches. The message will not be about politics, financial success, or how to feel good about yourself. You will hear the voice of God coming from the Holy Bible -- the only Book God has given; the message that will guide you from earth to heaven. It's the most important message in all the world! Check it out for yourself.

# **BAPTISM IN THE BIBLE**

## What is it? How is it done? What is its purpose?

It was the biggest disaster in the history of mankind. All living creatures were destined to die in a great flood that would leave a watermark higher than any deluge had ever been. No one could be saved by the best boats or by fleeing to the mountains. Only obedience to God would provide any salvation. When the flood was over only 8 souls had followed God's plan.

Ironically the very element that killed everyone else is what lifted the ark and its 8 passengers to safety. In 1 Peter chapter 3, the inspired writer explained the parallels between the salvation of Noah and his family with the salvation the Lord promises us today. Just as Noah was saved by the waters of the flood, "baptism, which corresponds to this now saves you" (verse 21). In the Bible the word "baptism" is a Greek word which always means to "dip, plunge or submerge." Bible baptism is by immersion.

Despite the very plain language and the example provided for us, many still struggle with the importance of baptism. "How could baptism possibly save us? Surely I have asked the Lord into my heart." The Bible says its not the water that is special; it's the obedience. "Not the removal of dirt from the body but the appeal to God for a clear conscience" (verse 21).

A man by the name of Naaman had a mind-set similar to many today (2 Kings 5:8-14). Naaman was burdened with leprosy—sores over his entire body with no hope for a cure. Elisha's instructions involved simple obedience: "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times and your flesh will be restored."

Naaman thought he knew better! Even if he should do something so mundane as to dunk himself in a river, why did it have to be the Jordan? There were two nicer rivers in Syria, his native country. He became angry and refused to comply. It took a humble servant to wake him up to his own stubbornness. Finally, he consented to obey the divine command to "go, dip." Naaman dipped in the Jordan seven times and came up from the water a healed man!

Was following the exact commands of God important for both Noah and Naaman? Of course! The purpose of the water of the great flood was to float the ark and thereby save 8 souls from destruction. The purpose of Naaman dipping in the Jordan was to make it possible to be healed. The purpose of baptism today is to "save us" through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, "appealing to God for a clear conscience." Have you been baptized according to the Scripture plan?

— Jason Floyd, Minister Bennington Church of Christ Bennington, Vermont

# CHURCH IS AN IMPORTANT HELP FOR FAMILIES

Imagine if all parents raised children to be properly educated, motivated, protected and spiritually focused. Imagine if all children always loved their parents and did what their parents asked them to do. The picture we have just painted is a figment of imagination!

The truth is that parents are imperfect and children need careful guidance. Some marriages end in divorce, some families need more patience and love. Some parents have conflicting religious beliefs. Parents do not always agree on what instruction, discipline, encouragement and correction children need.

Parents of other generations made their share of mistakes, too. King David and his son, Solomon, reigned over Israel in the Old Testament. David is described as "a man after God's own heart;" and Solomon was the wisest man on earth. Yet both of these famous men needed spiritual guidance for rearing their children. When they did not provide the spiritual guidance it brought heartache to their entire family.

Solomon wrote: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction. Here, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching, for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck" (Proverbs 1:7-9). Important words for both parents and children!

Are you looking for support as you teach your children about relationships with siblings, friends and neighbors? Would you like your family to be around people whose values are shaped by Christian teachings? Would you like to draw your family closer to God and establish godly character? Do you want them to appreciate justice for all? It makes sense to spend time with people who follow Jesus, who put His kingdom first. He will show you what it takes to be better parents and to assure a bright future for your children!

Churches of Christ encourage you to bring your family to a church that teaches only the Bible. You and your children will learn what God wants you to know. It will be a very wise decision!

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