



**"These were more noble than those in Thessalonica,
in that they received the word with all readiness of mind,
and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so."**

— Acts 17:11

What Is the Church of Christ?

When you hear the term "Church of Christ," what do you think about? Probably most people think about a building in a particular locality with the name "Church of Christ" on it. Others may think about what they view as a "denomination" within "Christendom." Still others may think about a friendly and benevolent group of people who call themselves the "Church of Christ." In this article, we are considering the term church of Christ from the standpoint of the Bible. Biblically speaking, "What Is the Church of Christ?"

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IS AN INSTITUTION ESTABLISHED BY GOD. An institution is an organization within society or culture. There are numerous institutions — some good, some not so good. However, there are only three institutions established by God.

When God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness..." (Genesis 1:26), and when He made woman from the rib of Adam (Genesis 2:21-23), He established the oldest institution which is the home. When Jesus spoke of marriage (Matthew 19:5), He quoted from Genesis 2:24. He said, "For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh." Thus, the home was established at the very beginning of time.

As the population of man grew, God established His second institution — governments. Paul wrote, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God" (Romans 13:1). God established governments to serve two basic purposes: "for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well" (1 Peter 2:14).

In the city of Jerusalem, God established His third institution — the church of Christ. Though it was in the mind of God before the creation of the world, the church was not established until the Jewish holiday of Pentecost in AD 30, fifty days after the crucifixion of Jesus. On that marvelous and miraculous day, the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles, and they began to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ in its completeness for the first time. Those who heard "were pricked in their heart" and asked, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). "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 Spirit" (Acts 2:38). On that day, there were three thousand souls immersed into Christ and added to the church (Acts 2:41).

NOT ONLY IS THE CHURCH ONE OF THREE DIVINE INSTITUTIONS, IT WAS PLANNED, PROPHESED, AND PROMISED. In the fifth century BC while in exile in Babylon, Daniel interpreted King Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Daniel 2). He saw five kingdoms. The fifth kingdom would be an eternal kingdom that would never be

destroyed and shall stand forever. Daniel saw it would be established by the God of heaven in the days fourth kingdom — the Roman Empire (verse 44).

During the eighth century BC, Isaiah prophesied the establishment of the Lord's house (Isaiah 2:2-3) which is the church (1 Timothy 3:15). He saw all nations flowing into it which has its fulfillment in the gospel age (Romans 1:16). He also saw the word of the Lord going forth from Jerusalem which, again, is fulfilled in Acts 2.

Jesus and His disciples as well as John the baptizer preached, "the kingdom of God is at hand" (Matthew 4:17; 10:6-7; Mark 1:14-15). In fact, Jesus said, "There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom" (Matthew 16:28). The kingdom (or church) was so at hand that it was to come in the lifetime of some living in Jesus' day.

In Acts 2, the kingdom/church was established in Jerusalem (Joel 2), in the days of the Roman kings (Daniel 2), and all nations flowed into it (Isaiah 2). Throughout the epistles of the New Testament, the kingdom existed, and Christians were citizens of it (Colossians 1:13; 1 Thessalonians 2:12; Hebrews 12:28).

NOT ONLY IS THE CHURCH A DIVINE INSTITUTION THAT WAS PROPHESED AND PROMISED, BUT IT IS DIVINELY REGULATED IN DOCTRINE, WORSHIP, MISSION, AND ORGANIZATION. Because the church of Christ belongs to Christ, it is not left to man to regulate. When man takes it upon himself to regulate the church, it is simply "will worship" (i.e. self-imposed or self-made religion; Colossians 2:23). Christ is the testator of the New Testament (Hebrews 9:15-17). In other words, the New Testament is Christ's testament. It was given for us to study, understand, and follow. Since "sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4), then to not follow Christ's testament is sin.

To learn more about the church, write to the address below for a free copy of my book, "Biblically Speaking about the Church" (Conway residences only).

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Who Will Be Saved?

Perhaps the most quoted verse in the Bible is John 3:16, “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*” Add to this, the next verse, “*For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.*” God wants men to be saved. He loves man so much that He gave His Son so each person could be saved. Peter speaks of this in 2 Peter 3:9, “*The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.*” Paul said that God “...desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1Timothy 2:4). These passages make it clear. God wants everyone to be saved.

The problem in the religious world is not knowing that God wants all men to be saved but rather understanding how one goes about obtaining salvation. There is a vast difference of opinion concerning what one must do in order to be saved. Therefore, it is extremely crucial to be noble and look to God’s word, the Bible, for instructions on salvation (Acts 17:11). There are many people that would simply look to John 3:16 and then say to be saved all one must do is believe in Christ. Some might quote Romans 10:13, “*whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.*” There are even some who would say there is nothing man needs to do to be saved because God has done all that needs to be done. These would, in turn, admonish a person to simply enjoy life and know Heaven is waiting for him or her.

It is true the Bible says those who call on Jesus’ name will be saved, but Jesus also said, “*Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven*” (Matthew 7:21). In other words, there is

more to calling on the name of the Lord than simply saying “Lord.” It is necessary to consider all the Bible says on this subject in order to properly understand what needs to be done to be saved.

In order to better understand what the Bible says one must do to be saved, it is necessary to look at the instances in the Bible where people were saved and see what they did to get that way. In Acts 2:36-41, the Bible says people were saved by believing and being baptized. In Acts 8:26-40, the Ethiopian eunuch was saved by believing in his heart, confessing Jesus, and being baptized. Saul of Tarsus heard the word from Ananias, was baptized and immediately started living differently — living faithfully (Acts 9:10-22). Cornelius was saved by hearing Peter preach the word and being baptized (Acts 10). The Philippian jailor heard the message from Paul and Silas, showed fruits of repentance by cleaning their wounds and was baptized (Acts 16:25-34).

When the Bible viewed from its entirety, it is easy to see what one must do in order to be saved: One must hear the word of God and believe it. Their belief will cause them to repent of the sins they have committed and confess Jesus Christ to be the Son of God. Finally, they will be baptized for the remission of their sins and live a faithful life of service and devotion to God. One might criticize this plan by saying there is not one example of one person doing all of these things. If God required it of any of these people, then He will require it of all men. “*God shows no partiality*” (Acts 10:34). Therefore, we can know that each of these individuals did each of these things even though it may not be specifically mentioned. And we can know that God requires the same of everyone today.

Dear reader, save yourself now before it is everlastingly too late.

Jeremy Northrop, Ashland, MS

What Is The Proper Name For The Church?

Respect for things spiritual is an admirable trait. So few these days seem to have any regard for religion in general or for God in particular. Especially does this seem to be the case with so much emphasis having been paid to the tragic events of what has come to be called 9/11 and the war with Iraq. As a result, many are suspect of most religions. Happily, some still think there is something worth our reverence in this world. Such is the case with the church and what concerned people think they ought to call it. Just how shall we refer to the church about which we read in the Bible, that which Jesus built, and that which God blesses?

Surprising to many, the church of the Bible has NO proper name. Denominations are “named things” but not so the New Testament church. The Bible reveals the church was known AS and BY a variety of terms, most of which (if not all) are more descriptive in nature than simply a “designation.” The New Testament church is not a denomination, for denominations by definition are “separate parts of” an original. Obviously, the church of the Bible is the original.

So, how was the church described or called in the New Testament? This writer was able to find at least a dozen ways the church was referred to in the New Testament. It was called **the church (Acts 9:31)**, “**my church**” (**Jesus being the owner/builder, Matthew 16:18**), **the brethren (Acts 11:29)**, negatively speaking: **the Nazarene sect (Acts 24:5)**, **God’s people, or the people of God (1 Peter 2:10)**, **sons of God (Romans 9:26)**, **the temple of God**

(**2 Corinthians 6:16**), **the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16)**, **the Way (Acts 9:2)**, **the church of the firstborn (Hebrews 12:23)**, **the bride (Revelation 21:9)**, **the church of God (1 Corinthians 1:2)**, and **the churches of Christ (Romans 16:16)**. Likely there are more to be found, but let these suffice to show that the church was not a named thing, but described in a variety of texts that fit the context.

Those who are a part of the New Testament church today have chosen to be identified to one another by referring to the church of Christ (the church that belongs to Christ). The church of Christ (or collectively, the churches of Christ) is comprised of congregations of individuals who have been added by the Lord to his church (Acts 2:47) that He promised to build (Matthew 16:18,19) upon their obedience to the Gospel (there is death in failing to obey the Gospel, 2 Thessalonians 1:8; 1 Peter 4:17). The Gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). One obeys that death when they are “crucified with Christ” (Galatians 2:20). That “crucifixion” takes place when one joins Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection, and this is accomplished in their being baptized into Christ (Romans 6:3-7).

Good reader, are you a part of the church for which Jesus died? Did you join Him in crucifixion? Do so before it is too late...obey His Gospel! Thanks for reading. God bless you in your study of His word.

Robin W. Haley, Reynoldsburg, OH

WHY ARE SOME LIVES “EASY” AND OTHERS “DIFFICULT”?

Literature is full of the cries of suffering people who wonder why they suffer so much while others seem to suffer so little. In the Psalms, for example, the question “How long?” is asked at least sixty times! Let us note that some of the discrepancy is due to the fact that we do not always know what difficulties other people are having (especially when our real attention is on our own!).

The first answer to our question is to understand the power of **ignorance**. People who are ignorant of the Bible cannot answer spiritual questions properly. A life that may seem to be easy may be headed toward great trouble, and a life that may be difficult may be headed toward great happiness. Our human wisdom just is not sufficient to answer these things (Jeremiah 10:23). Proverbs 14:12 says, “*There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.*”

The second answer to our question is to understand the concept of **free will**. This is to say, God gave us the ability to make our own choices (Joshua 24:15). Our choices — informed and uninformed, good and bad — have consequences. When we make the choice to follow the ways of God, we are choosing a way that has restrictions that can make life difficult. On the other hand, when we make the choice to “go with the flow,” we have chosen a way that may appear to be fairly easy. Jesus described these choices in Matthew 7:13,14: “*Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.*”

The third answer to our question is to learn how the **providence** of God uses “easy” and “difficult” things in various circumstances. The overall picture of God’s providence in the lives of those who love Him is for **good**. Note how this is stated in Romans 8:28: “*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*” God’s providence allowed Abraham to have things “easy” (in some ways) for a great deal of his life, while His providence allowed intense suffering to come upon Job (see Genesis 12-25; Job 1-42). The key for these men was **not** in whether life was easy or difficult, but whether they would continue to humbly obey Him!

The fourth answer to our question has to do with the concept of **dedication**. Jesus regularly taught that those who followed Him would suffer. His reasoning was very simple, “*If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you*” (John 15:18). Later, He said, “*In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world*” (John 16:33b). The history of the early church shows this came true. Possibly the most severe persecution came upon Paul, whose writings frequently tell us of his trials. And it was Paul who wrote: “*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*” (2 Timothy 3:12). Let us conclude this point by noting Matthew 5:10-12: “*Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*”

The fifth answer to our question is the Biblical principle of **sowing and reaping**. This principle is concisely stated in Galatians 6:7,8: “*Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.*” This one principle goes a long way in helping us to “get a grip” on the ups and downs of life. We reap **as** we sow, we reap **more** than we sow, we reap **longer** than we sow, and we reap what **others** sow.

God has allowed this world to be filled with pleasure and pain so that we can be tested — and so that we will be wise enough to look to His word for real answers. Not all pleasure is good (Genesis 3:6), and not all pain is bad (James 1:2-12).

Skip Andrews, Duluth, GA

The Home Is God’s Institution

The world is filled with institutions that have been created by human beings to serve various needs of humanity. Some of the institutions men have established to serve humanity are public and private schools, universities, social clubs, recreational organizations, stores, clinics, hospitals, benevolence organizations, and host of others. Most of these man-made institutions have made a positive impact upon and in the lives of human beings, and in many cases, the world is a better place because of them. However, there is one institution that was not created but was established by God, and that is the home. The home is God’s institution.

The Bible says, “*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth*” (Genesis 1:1). The first verse of the Bible sets forth the fact that God created everything, and a part of creation was the home or the family. God created humanity, the first two human beings, male and female, Adam and Eve, and at the same time, he established the home. God did not create human beings and then days, weeks, months, or even years later establish the home.

It was during the creation process that God said, “*Let us make man in our image...*” (Genesis 1:26), and the biblical account of the creation goes on to record, “*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them*” (Genesis 1:26). Then God said to this male and female, “...*be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it...*” (Genesis 1:28). Within the day the first man and woman were created, God was verbally communicating with them and giving various instructions (Genesis 1:28-30). The day they were created, God talked with the first male and female, Adam and Eve, and they were capable of understanding what God said to them. It is evident they understood because when God instructed Adam not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, Adam understood God’s will, and then communicated it to Eve (Genesis 1:15-17, 3:1-3, 11-12).

Biblical evidence that God established the home in the beginning is confirmed by the Genesis record, “*Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh*” (Genesis 2:24). It is also confirmed by what Jesus said. Jesus attributed the Genesis statement to God when He said, “*Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and the twain shall be one flesh*” (Matthew 19:4-5). The statement made in Genesis, and confirmed by Jesus as being from God, indicates that the home is a divinely established institution, and that the first man and woman were fully capable of understanding their relationship and roles with one another.

The home is not the result of some evolutionary process that has come about through culture, society, or the will of man, but the home has come into existence by the creation, design, and authority of God. The Bible teaches that the home existed before all cultures, societies, or nations. Many of these have come and gone through the years, but the home still remains. Because God created the home, and it is his institution for humanity, God has authority over the home regarding the roles and responsibilities of each person in the home. The home belongs to God.

Wayne Brewer, Mabelvale, AR

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Does God Care About...

- Friday 7 P.M. "...Our Standard of Authority?"
- Friday 8 P.M. "...Which Church I Attend?"
- Saturday 10 A.M. "...My Pain and Suffering?"
- Saturday 11 A.M. "...How I Worship?"
- Saturday 1 P.M. "...My Spiritual Destiny?"
- Saturday 2 P.M. "...How I Live as a Christian?"
- Sunday 9:30 A.M. "...My Family and Friends?"
- Sunday 10:30 A.M. "...the Work of the Church?"
- Sunday 5 P.M. "...Morality and Ethics?"
- Sunday 6 P.M. "...God Does Care, Do You?"

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Is "Faith Only" a Biblical Concept?

Faith is an important and essential part in the life of one who seeks to be saved. Without faith, it is impossible to please God. (Hebrews 11:6) To see the necessity of faith, one needs only to look at the "honor roll" of faith found in Hebrews 11. Every individual mentioned in this chapter found favor in God's eyes because their lives were

directed by Biblical faith. Notice "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house" (Hebrews 11:7). It was by faith that he moved (took appropriate action).

Faith is defined as persuasion, credence, conviction and reliance. It is the system of religious truth itself, assurance, belief and fidelity. The Bible defines faith as "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). And, faith is produced by the word of God (Romans 10:17).

"Faith only" is a doctrine that gives the hope of salvation apart from action on man's part. This precept is foreign to Bible teachings concerning the faith that really saves. Many teach that man cannot do anything in the process of saving the soul. Some preachers will say "faith only is a most wholesome doctrine and full of comfort." How sad it is that some never investigate this unfounded claim. In fact, the Bible uses the term "faith only" just one time, and that is in the negative. Scripture says "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (James 2:24). There is a great deal of difference in being saved by faith and being saved by faith alone. We are saved by faith but not faith alone! If one is saved by "faith only," then grace would be excluded. When a person teaches salvation by "faith only," he excludes everything else but being saved by faith. The truth of the matter is, the Bible teaches there are several elements involved in man's salvation. Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord (Genesis 6:8); yet was required to build an ark to the saving of his house (Genesis 6:14-16; Hebrews 11:7). Both elements were necessary to bring about the saving of Noah and his family.

There are those who cite Ephesians 2:8-9 and Romans 11:6 as proof that salvation does not come by any work that we might do. However these passages teach that there are works that we must do!

Verse 10 of Ephesians 2 states Christians are "...created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." The "works" forbidden are works of man's own invention. We are not saved by those, yet we are to be involved and obedient to the works which God has ordained (2 Timothy 3:16-17). We are to abound unto every good work (2 Corinthians 9:8), and we are to provoke one another unto love and good works (Hebrews 10:24). We are to be fruitful in good works (Colossians 1:10), and we are to be ready to accomplish every good work (Titus 3:1).

The teaching that requires faith and obedience is the doctrine of the Bible. The doctrine of "faith only" is condemned in the clear statement from Jesus Christ when He said, "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46) Jesus often taught the necessity of believing and obeying, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 7:21) We can see that saving faith consists of believing and acting upon that belief.

Many will say, "But we are all saved by the blood of Jesus Christ, and if one work is added, it cancels the salvation by blood." They think that baptism is a work which cancels out salvation by His blood. However Jesus Himself stated, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). Baptism was not devised from the minds of men. It is a work ordained of God and is required. We come to salvation by it. "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:21). Peter added works (repentance and baptism) in Acts 2:38; John added obedience in 1 John 2:3; and Jesus declared His friends to be those who do whatsoever He commanded in John 15:14. No, "faith only" is not a wholesome and soul saving doctrine. Salvation is accomplished by hearing God's word, believing God's word and obeying God's word.

Please keep this in mind when considering the "faith only" doctrine, "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him" (1 John 2:4-5). How can one who believes and practices the "faith only" doctrine be saved? Is "faith only" an approved Biblical doctrine?

Toney Smith, Dresden, TN