

What Is The Church Of Christ?

It is commonplace now to look down upon "organized religion." "Organized religion" is usually equated with mainline Protestant denominations, which are in decline. The Lord's church is not "organized religion," but it does have organization. God did not leave man to his every whim when it came time to serve Him. The church is an assembly of those who believe that Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God. In the gospel of Matthew, the apostle Peter said to Jesus, *"Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God"* (16:16) Upon Peter's confession of faith, Christ responded, *"... on this rock I will build my church."* Acknowledgment of Jesus as the Christ, God's Son, is the foundation upon which Christ's church is built.

As in the first century church, Christ's church today respects and obeys the Bible (2 Timothy 3:15-17). The scriptures are of utmost importance in determining the work and worship of the church, and our conduct as a church and as individuals. In fact, Christ's church in New Testament times used the scriptures as the standard of faith. The Bible records in Acts 17:11, *"... they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so."*

Members of Christ's church express their love for the Lord by obeying His commandments (John 14:15). Obedience to Christ also saves one from sin (Hebrews 5:9). It must be noted, contrary to popular views, that salvation from sin places one in the church of Christ. Acts 2:47 states, *"And the Lord added to the church daily, those who were being saved."*

How does one obey Christ? The Bible says, *"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"* (Hebrews 11:6). John wrote, in John 20:31, *"... these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."* We must believe that Jesus was buried, and that He rose on the third day. This is a fundamental principle that must be believed in order to be saved.

One must also repent. When the apostle Peter preached, he told the people, *"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord"* (Acts 3:19). What does *"repent and be converted"* mean? Repentance means "to change one's mind or purpose." It is a reversal of moral purpose. "Convert" means "to turn about ... a turning from and turning to." This clearly portrays the actual turning from sin to the will of God. There is individual responsibil-

ity to change one's behavior (cf. Acts 26:19-20). Repentance and conversion are necessary for salvation and involve becoming obedient to Christ.

God also requires that men confess and acknowledge publicly that Christ is the Son of God. After one has believed and truly repented, he must confess Christ before men. Jesus said, *"Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven"* (Matthew 10:32-33). Paul made a similar statement in Romans 10:9-10. One cannot be saved if he will not acknowledge Christ as Lord before men.

The last step that one must participate in to be saved and be added to the church of Christ is to be baptized. Baptism is "the process of immersion, submergence and emergence." When Paul was converted he was told, *"And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord"* (Acts 22:16). Besides baptism being necessary for salvation and the remission of sins, the commandment itself contains symbolism appropriate to conversion. Romans 6:4-6 says, *"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: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin."* Baptism demonstrates how we rise to newness of life like Jesus was raised from the dead. This shows how baptism is essential to our salvation.

Christ's church in the first century was opposed to those who attempted to change Christ's doctrine and truth. Paul warned the Galatians in Galatians 1:9, *"As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed."* The church of Christ today opposes those who attempt to change the doctrine of Christ. John clearly states in 2 John 9, *"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."* Since the church that belongs to Christ is governed by the scriptures, then what the church of Christ is and should be is found in the Bible. It is not defined by man and his definitions of "organized religion." Embrace the simple truth and *"save yourself from this untoward generation"* (Acts 2:40).

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