

Are You A "Church Of Christ" Christian?

Introduction. Which of the following statements are true: "We are a church of God," "We are a church of Christ," "We are a church of God in Christ," or "We are a church of the Way"? All of them are true!

Why ask this question? Because there is a growing trend diametrically opposed to the scriptures and to what we are trying to do. While many Christians rightly try to evaluate the content of truth in denominations, they have started to speak denominationally. I hear Christians saying, "I am church of Christ" or "You are church of Christ? Me too." Or even worse, they shorten it and say, "I am C.O.C." Christians introduce me as a "church of Christ preacher." They talk about "church of Christ doctrine." They ask if a radio program is a "church of Christ program," or if a book is a "church of Christ book." Moreover, it really concerns me when a Christian speaks of another person saying, "They are Christian, but they are not church of Christ" because this leaves the impression that the Lord's church is some kind of organizational subset of the universal body.

Most people want to be a disciple of Christ — a Christian only, and that includes me. I do not want to be a "Baptist Christian," a "Methodist Christian," a "Roman Catholic Christian," or a "Pentecostal Christian." But I do not want to be a "Church of Christ Christian" either. This language betrays a misunderstanding that exists among Christians. I see it on Facebook, in blogs, and in articles; I hear it in conversations and even in sermons — and it needs to be discussed.

I. What Is The Church Of Christ?

- A. The word "church" means a group of people called out for a special purpose. It originally referred to the assemblies of citizens gathered together to conduct public business (Acts 19:32, 39, 41). The word is a collective noun, like the words club, herd, flock, etc. These are singular words that refer to a group of members. A flock is a collection of sheep. A herd is a collection of cows. A church is a collection of people (cp. Acts 8:1).
- B. The prepositional phrase "of Christ" modifies that collective noun (cp. Romans 16:16). Saying "church of Christ" is the same as saying "Christ's church." When we say "church of Christ," those words biblically mean a group of people who belong to Jesus. When 1 Corinthians 1:2 talks about the "church of God that is in Corinth," it is referring to a group of people who belong to God and are in Corinth (cp. 1 Corinthians 3:23).
- C. "Church" is used in two main senses — a universal sense and a local sense.

1. In Matthew 16:18, when Jesus talked about building “his church,” He was referring to the church in a universal sense (cp. Ephesians 1:22-23; Hebrews 2:12). Just as flock is a collection of sheep and never refers to a collection of flocks, “church” always refers to a collection of people and never a collection of churches.
 - a) In Acts 9:26, when the Jerusalem Christians initially refused to accept Saul into their local fellowship, he was still part of the universal church.
 - b) Additionally, acceptance among a local group of saints does not mean the individual is actually part of the universal church (1 John 2:19).
 2. In a local sense, “church” designates several localized groups of people mentioned in the New Testament (Acts 9:19, 31; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:2). These groups of people are churches because they assemble, not just when they assemble. In Acts 8:3 the people Paul was persecuting were still the church in Jerusalem even though they were in their houses. Local congregations are not part of a greater organization with structure and hierarchy. But individual Christians are in fellowship with all the other individual Christians who call on Jesus no matter where they live.
- D. “Church of Christ” is not the official name of the Lord’s body.
1. The Bible never names either the universal church or local churches — it describes them. There are many descriptive phrases we could use to refer to our congregation:
 - a) “Churches of Christ” (Romans 16:16).
 - b) “Church of God” (1 Corinthians 1:2).
 - c) “The church of the living God” (1 Timothy 3:15).
 - d) “The household of God” (1 Timothy 3:15).
 - e) “Church of God in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 2:14).
 - f) “The churches of Galatia” (Galatians 1:2).
 - g) “The church of the Thessalonians” (1 Thessalonians 1:1).
 - h) “The saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi” (Philippians 1:1).
 - i) “The church of the firstborn” (Hebrews 12:23).
 - j) “The way” (Acts 9:2; 24:14, 22).
 - k) “The church” (Ephesians 1:22).
 2. If our sign had one of these other descriptive phrases on it, we would still be just as much a church of Christ or a church that belongs to Christ as we are now. Furthermore, there is not one single mention of congregations putting up signs with a designation on them in the New Testament. This suggests that we do not even have to have a particular phrase that we assert as our name.

II. When "Of Christ" Is Not Right Either

- A. In 1 Corinthians 1:12, Paul rebuked the Corinthians for their divisiveness. When Paul addressed them, he did not say, "And only a few of you are getting it right, saying that you are 'of Christ.'" He also never said, "You who are claiming to be of me, Apollos, and Cephas, you are lining up with the wrong groups. Those who are claiming to be 'of Christ' are getting it right. You need to be like that group." Instead, he rebuked the Corinthians for their divisiveness. Should all of these Christians say they are "of Christ" or "following Christ"? Of course. But apparently, the Corinthians who were claiming to be "of Christ" were committing the same kind of sectarian divisiveness in their declaration as those who were declaring to follow Paul, Apollos, and Cephas.
- B. The Corinthians were using correct terminology, but were using it incorrectly. "Church of Christ" is a biblical phrase, but if we use the phrase in the same way as denominations, then we are using a biblical phrase in unbiblical ways and showing that we misunderstand the fundamental nature of Christ's church. If we mean by the phrase "church of Christ" an organization of local congregations that have the name "church of Christ" on their sign, teach similar doctrines, and trade preachers among each other but are only one subset of all Christians, then we are just like the divisive Corinthians.

III. Carefully Using Terminology

- A. As we have seen, "church" is a collective term encompassing multiple people. As an individual, I cannot possibly be a collective. Furthermore, the phrase "church of Christ" is not the name of an organization that can be added to a role as an adjective.
 1. I am not "church of Christ," "a church of Christ," or a "COC." I am a disciple of Christ, a saint, or a Christian. I should not use the expression "all the other denominations," because I am not part of a denomination.
 2. I am a gospel preacher. I am not a "church of Christ preacher." There is no "church of Christ doctrine." There is Christ's doctrine. If we are teaching doctrine that was developed by men, our worship is vain (Matthew 15:9; 2 John 9). We must only teach the doctrine of Christ (Hebrews 6:1) and the doctrine of God (Titus 2:10).
 3. The phrase "church of Christ" is not the name of an organization that can be used as an adjective to describe the nature of this congregation. We are not a "church of Christ church." This congregation is not part of any larger organization called "the church(es) of Christ" like organizations that call themselves various kinds of Baptist: "Southern Baptist," "Missionary Baptist," "American Baptist," etc.

- a) If you are talking about congregations and are trying to find out if it is a faithful church or a church that follows the New Testament, ask those questions.
 - b) If you are referring to something else like a radio program, a book, or some kind of activity, then ask if it is run by Christians or written by a Christian.
- B. If you are in a conversation with people and some of them say, "We are Baptist," and others say, "We are Methodist," and others say, "We are Pentecostal," and others say, "We are Catholic," do not say, "I am church of Christ." Say, "I am just trying to be a Christian only" and see if that will generate a spiritual discussion leading to a study of Christ and His church.

Conclusion. You cannot be told how to become a "church of Christ Christian." However, you can be told how to become Christ's. If you realize you are a sinner and want to forsake that way of life, turning to God's way (Luke 24:47), and if you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, who God raised from the dead and you are willing to confess that belief (Romans 10:9-10), according to Galatians 3:27-29 you can be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). When you are baptized into Christ, you become Christ's. You are then part of the group of people who belong to Christ. According to Acts 2:47, when you belong to Christ, God adds you to His church — the church of God or the church of Christ. When you belong to Christ, we would invite you to join yourself to the group of disciples who belong to Jesus that meets here (Acts 9:26).

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