

Why Churches Of Christ Are Different

Introduction. When you compare the New Testament church to Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, or Catholicism, the differences are staggering. But what about a comparison between Protestant denominations? The most conservative tally I've seen puts the number of denominations at 200. That's staggering!

Students of the New Testament will admit they never read about a denomination in the New Testament. The reason is that denominations came into existence since the close of the New Testament period (about five hundred years ago) and without the authority of God. Jesus did not promise to build a denomination, therefore all denominations exist without the authority of Christ.

Our Lord did not align Himself with any party or division during His earthly ministry. There were four principle divisions among the Jews: the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Herodians, the Zealots, the Sicarii, and the Essenes. Although each advocated some truth, our Lord did not identify Himself with any of them.

The church of Christ, or the church that Jesus built (Matthew 16:18), is not a denomination. The Bible tells us all about the church that Jesus built, so we will turn our attention to five definite reasons why the church of Christ is not a denomination.

I. It Does Not Have A Denominational Head

- A. Christ is the only head of His church (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18).
 - 1. All authority rests with Him (Matthew 28:18).
 - 2. He will never die out of office (Romans 6:9; Hebrews 7:24-25).
 - 3. He reigns in heaven over His kingdom (Colossians 3:1).
 - 4. His reign will continue until the end of the world (1 Corinthians 15:24).
- B. Any man, or group of men, who attempt to legislate for the church becomes the "man of sin" (2 Thessalonians 2:4-5).

II. It Does Not Have A Denominational Organization

- A. Modern denominations are highly organized.
 - 1. Denominations have their headquarters on earth with legislative, judicial, and executive authority vested in some man or group of men.
 - 2. Each congregation is tied to all other congregations in that denomination by a man-made organization of conferences, councils, and/or conventions.
 - 3. The question is sometimes asked, "Doesn't the church of Christ have headquarters?" The headquarters of Christ's church is in heaven.
- B. The church of Christ's organization is shaped after the New Testament pattern.
 - 1. Each congregation is a unit within itself: Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, etc.
 - 2. No two congregations are tied together by a human organization.
 - 3. The only offices known to this organization are elders and deacons (Philippians 1:1).
 - a) Each congregation has its own elders and deacons (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). There are no brotherhood elderships with authority in more than one congregation (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2-3).

- b) These men are qualified according to the New Testament (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9); they are not chosen at random.

III. It Does Not Have A Denominational Name

- A. The church of Christ accepts only the names that are found in the New Testament (“the church of God,” Acts 20:28; “churches of Christ,” Romans 16:16; “church of the firstborn,” Hebrews 12:23). There were no Pentecostal churches, Baptist churches, Methodist churches, or Presbyterian churches in the first century.
- B. Individual members of the church wear New Testament names (“believers,” Acts 5:14; “disciples,” Acts 6:1; “Christian,” Acts 11:26; “brethren,” Romans 10:1; “saints,” Romans 15:25). There were no Pentecostals, Baptists, Methodists, or Presbyterians in the first century.

IV. It Does Not Have A Denominational Doctrine

- A. Members of denominations have been led to believe they entered into Christ by one action, and later joined a denomination by a different procedure. Members of the church did not “join” it; they were “added” to it by God (Acts 2:47).
- B. The New Testament teaches that one who becomes a Christian enters into Christ and is added to the church by obeying the gospel:
 - 1. Hear (John 6:44-45; Romans 10:17).
 - 2. Believe (John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6).
 - 3. Repent (Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 17:30).
 - 4. Confess (Matthew 10:32; Romans 10:10).
 - 5. Be baptized (Mark 16:16; 1 Corinthians 12:13).
- C. Therefore, the doctrines associated with saved by faith only, accepting Jesus into your heart, or saying the sinner’s prayer are not in the Bible. Furthermore, the doctrine of once saved, always saved and of a 1,000-year reign of Christ on the earth are not in the Bible.
- D. The church of Christ does not follow not man-made creeds, disciplines, manuals, catechisms, confessions of faith, etc. Anyone who preaches a perverted gospel and goes beyond the doctrine of Christ does not have God (Galatians 1:6-9; 2 John 9).

V. It Does Not Have A Denominational Work Or Worship

- A. Denominations work through human societies and organizations. Some of the works denominations do:
 - 1. They establish, maintain, and control secular institutions and businesses.
 - 2. They provide recreation and entertainment.
 - 3. They encourage and manage political involvement and affairs.
 - 4. In contrast, churches of Christ promote the work of evangelism (Philippians 4:15-17), edification (Hebrews 10:25), and benevolence (Acts 11:27-30) only through the local church. No missionary societies nor charitable institutions are employed.
- B. They have introduced into the worship actions for which there is no authority in the Bible.

1. Nothing is used as an item of worship in the church of Christ which is not commanded by Christ and His apostles. Luke in Acts 2:42-47 describes what the new Christians did to worship God when the church started.
2. Instrumental music, choirs, solos, and special worship assemblies at Easter, Christmas are not found in New Testament teaching.

Conclusion. Followers of Christ in apostolic times were not denominationalists. If we reproduce the exact pattern of the church they were members of, how can we be members of a denomination? Study like the noble Bereans and rest yourself in the truth. When you find it, hold fast to it, and worship with a group who holds the same precious beliefs.

I am deeply indebted to Donald Townsley for the use of his material.