

# Why The Church Of Christ Is Different

**Introduction.** There is an obvious desire among many to downplay what is distinctive about the New Testament church. It seems evident that as congregations grow in number and attain some affluence and respectability in the community, there is a tendency to accept the notion that we are just another church among the churches.

The desire to fit in and not appear out of step with culture is common in society so the world pressures us to surrender to the culture of pluralism. The entertainment media, education venues, and even the government advocates acceptance of almost every kind of diversity in both religion and morality. What is deemed unacceptable is firm and outspoken commitment to Christ.

Followers of Christ are not "of the world" and must "love not the world" (John 17:14-15; 1 John 2:15-16). There are times when God's people are respected and admired by their society (Acts 2:47; 4:21), but this will be the exception when Christians are truly convicted (John 15:18-19). During our Lord's time on the earth, many of the leaders of the Jewish synagogues believed in Him but refused to openly take a stand with Him (John 12:42-43). Christians need to be educated in the differences of the New Testament church compared to false religions.

## I. ***Differences That Matter***

- A. There is no virtue in being different for the sake of being different. Preaching that is harsh in tone or unfair in its condemnation of others will give the church a reputation for being different, but that would not be a commendation. Instead, we should strive to be known as people who temper the firmness of our convictions with love (1 Corinthians 13:1).
- B. God's people are supposed to make a difference in a harsh and selfish world (Matthew 5:13; 1 Thessalonians 3:12). In contrast to the hedonism all around them, members of Christ's church need to be outstanding in purity (2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 Peter 4:3-4).
- C. As surely as the church must be distinctive in heart and character, so also we must be distinctive in faith and practice.
  1. The gospel is unique and unchangeable. Its presentation will not avoid controversy against every false way (Psalm 119:104, 128).
  2. Sometimes the fight is defensive, showing by the word of God the authority behind our doctrine and practice (1 Peter 3:15), and sometimes it is offensive, teaching and exposing error (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

## II. **A Bible Church**

- A. In contending that the church of Christ is different, we are, of course, citing what the church is according to the scriptures. The design of the church that Jesus built is perfect (Ephesians 3:10-11). Every scripturally baptized person is a member of the universal body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13).
- B. When non-members become acquainted with churches of Christ, they immediately notice several differences.
  - 1. Some of the first observations are the absence of instrumental music, the Lord's supper every Sunday, an emphasis on baptism, women not having leading, public parts in worship, no choir, etc.
  - 2. Furthermore, there is no clergy-laity arrangement, and congregations are autonomous with no organizational authority beyond the local group. There are also no councils or conventions to rule over the church.
  - 3. Finally, as they listen to faithful preachers, they will see the emphasis that is put on actual statements of scripture to prove what is taught and done.
- C. From the human side none are perfect, but by God's grace and in compliance with apostolic teaching, a congregation can be a faithful church (Revelation 2:19; 3:8).

## III. **Foundational Principles**

- A. No one is the official spokesperson for churches of Christ. Our position on any matter should be examined from the context of foundational principles.
- B. The following are some items we can observe from the scriptures about foundational convictions that should characterize true "churches of Christ."
  - 1. The church of Christ is different when we accept that Christ is the only head of the church (Matthew 28:18; Colossians 1:18). We accept neither the pretense of Rome nor the various councils and hierarchies of Protestantism.
  - 2. The church of Christ is different when the Bible is our only guide. We have no manual, discipline, articles of faith, or book of church order (cp. 2 Timothy 3:17; 2 Peter 1:3; Jude 3).
  - 3. The church of Christ is different when every person is permitted to study the Bible for himself (John 5:39; Acts 17:11). There is no creed and no official interpretation. It is not, "What does your church teach?", but "What does the Bible teach?" It is not, "What would your church say?", but "What does God say?"
  - 4. The church of Christ is different when authority for what we practice is determined by command (1 Corinthians 14:37; 16:1), example

- (1 Corinthians 11:1-2; Philippians 3:17), or necessary inference (Matthew 16:5-12; Acts 15:7-11).
5. The church of Christ is different when we respect the silence of the scriptures. This means recognizing that actions which are not authorized in the scriptures simply cannot be done (1 Thessalonians 5:21; cp. Hebrews 7:11-13).
  6. The church of Christ is different when congregations have fellowship with brethren of "common faith" (Romans 1:12; Titus 1:4; 2 Peter 1:1), but each are organized under the autonomy of their own elders (Acts 14:23; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 5:2).
  7. The church of Christ is different when our view of history recognizes that there was a great apostasy from the apostolic pattern, and that there have been innumerable divisions and heresies over time (2 Thessalonians 2:3-12; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 2 Timothy 4:3-4). When people leave the apostolic pattern, these apostasies will continue.

**Conclusion.** The Israelites wanted a king in 1 Samuel 8:5 so they could be like the nations around them. This is the temptation for the church when we become too afraid that we might appear unsophisticated, stubborn, and unloving in the eyes of the world (Galatians 1:10; cp. 1 Thessalonians 2:4).