



# What Is A "Church Of Christ"?

"The churches of Christ salute you." - Romans 16:16

As a member of a group meeting regularly in my community and calling itself a "church of Christ", I am often asked, "What is this 'church of Christ'?" It is a question that deserves an answer and, as a member of the group, I ought to be able to answer it. So, let's give it a try:

Churches of Christ have been around for thousands of years. The first one met in Jerusalem shortly after the ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven (Acts 2). Other such groups sprang up in various communities in the old Roman Empire. The book of Acts gives a history of the establishing of such churches in various communities and many of the New Testament epistles were written to such churches. Where the gospel of Christ was preached such churches were established.

The background of the term "church of Christ" will help one understand these groups better. "Church" is the English translation of the Greek term "ekklesia", meaning an assembly that has been summoned or called out for a purpose. In the New Testament it is applied to that great universal body (or assembly, congregation, or church) of people, saved by the gospel of Christ - all Christians. There is but one such body (Eph. 4:4; 1:22,23; Matt. 16:18) and all of the saved are in it (Acts 2:47; Eph. 5:23).

It is also applied to a group of Christians in given location banded together, as a unit, to worship the Lord and do his work. Hence, one reads of "churches (plural) of Christ" (Rom. 16:16); "churches of God which are in Christ Jesus" (I Thess. 2:14); the churches of Galatia (Gal. 1:2) and other similar expressions.

In the first several years following the establishment of the church on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), these churches were aided, guided and directed by divinely inspired men (See I Cor. 12-14). The word of God, revealed to such men by the Holy Spirit, is the foundation upon which the church must rest (Eph. 2:20-3:5). None of these men are living today, but we have their word, written and preserved. It is "the faith once (for all) delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). What these men wrote to the churches was indeed the "commandment of the Lord" (I Cor. 14:37). So, what was commanded of one church was commanded in all the churches (I Cor. 4:17; 7:17). In fact, an epistle addressed to one church should be read and heeded by other churches. (Col. 4:16) A letter could be addressed to and circulated among several churches (Gal. 1:2; Rev. 1:4; 2:7,11,17,19; 3:6,13,22). This is possible because the basic spiritual needs of humanity transcends any given time period and geographical boundaries. Men in every age and in every place sin and need salvation. They need to worship God and do his work - which is the same everywhere.

Now, the local church of Christ, of which I am a member, has not received any letters addressed directly to it from any inspired man - but we have the their writings (called "Scriptures" - 1 Pet. 3:16) - "the faith once delivered" - to produce faith, sustain hope and guide our practice as Christians and as a church of Christ. What was good (or bad) for a Christian or a church in the first century is good (or bad) for us today.

Though those churches of Christ had a common faith, were subject to a common authority (the authority of Christ through His ambassadors, the apostles), common goals, and a common hope - they were organically independent of one another. They were referred to as separate units. They functioned as separate units. Each was given its own oversight - as soon as there were men qualified for that work. (See Acts 14:23; 20:17).

Here is a list of things these churches did under the direction of the apostles:

1. They met together to:

(1) Eat the Lord's supper upon "upon the first day of the week". (Acts 20:7) "as \_ church" (1 Cor. 11:18 NKJV) "in one place" (1 Cor. 11:20) - not the place for "eating and drinking" socially (1 Cor. 11:22,34).

(2) Sing spiritual songs together (Eph. 5:19; 1 Cor. 14:15).

(3) Pray together (1 Cor. 14:15).

(4) Teach and learn together (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 14:31).

(5) Gather funds for its work "upon the first day of the week" (1 Cor. 16:1-2). Hence, each had its own treasury - there is no instructions in the New Testament for a common treasury into which all the churches contributed for their common work and to promote their common interest.

(6) Discipline its own wayward members when needed. (1 Cor. 5; 2 Thess. 3:6ff).

2. They sent the gospel out into their communities and the world at large. (1 Thess. 1:8; Phil 4:11ff).

3. They cared for their own needy members (Acts 6) and sent money to other churches to help them care for theirs (Acts 11:29-30; 2 Cor. 8,9).

4. They edified (built up) themselves in the faith (Eph. 4:11-16).

Churches directed by the Lord's ambassadors had no denominational names nor any denominational ties. As sanctified people (1 Cor. 1:1,2) they were set apart unto God or Christ (hence churches of CHRIST or GOD) - not set apart from each other into denominations. They were not tied together into some universal denominational machine. They were, as previously noted, independent units under Christ.

Noticeably absent from the New Testament record of churches of Christ are social, political, and recreational activities that are so popular in many modern churches. Nor were there any auxiliary organizations to the church, to receive funding from the church to do the church's work.

We hope that we have been helpful in your understanding of what a "church of Christ" is. We are simply trying to be a local "church of Christ" like those you read about in the Bible.

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BENNY SORREL IN OUR SUMMER PROGRAM. Benny is one of our members here at Fultondale, who plans to go into full-time work somewhere after this summer's program is completed. He will begin working full-time (leaving a good secular job) in our summer program about the 1st of May and hopes to move someplace to preach about August 1

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#### JUST AN ORDINARY MEMBER

Just an ordinary member of the church I here her say,

But you'd always find her present, even on a rainy day.

She had a warm handclasp for the stranger in the aisle,

And a friend who was in trouble found sunshine in her smile.

When the sermon helped her, she told the preacher so;

And when she needed help, she let the elders know.

She always gave so freely and tried to do her share,

In all the ordinary takes for which some have no care.

Her talents were not many, but here love for God was true.

Her prayers were not in public, but she prayed for me and you.

An "ordinary member" did you say?? I think I would say

She was "extra ordinary," in a humble sort of way.

- Author unknown.

## COUNTS

(From Page 1)

We need to be reminded that since God is absolutely fair (v. 25) that His rule of remembering and forgetting works the other way too!

"But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live? All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; because of the unfaithfulness of which he is guilty and the sin which he has committed, because of them he shall die."

Ezekiel 18:24 †.

We prefer to ignore that side of the coin. We think that surely our past faithfulness and good ought to count for something! We often continue (long past any reasonable period for longsuffering) to excuse, endorse, and receive brethren - without rebuke or rebuff - regardless of how bad their present views, teaching, or conduct may have become, because of what they have been in the past. Their past goodness, soundness and faithfulness is the only justification that we can give for our failure to deal with them as being unfaithful. It is sad, tragic, but factual that the greater one's reputation for faithfulness in the past; the more dangerous is his influence for evil, if he turns aside after error. His present influence is more readily imitated and dangerous than it would otherwise be.

But, you and I need to look that this matter personally. How wonderful it will be to get to judgment and not have all of our past unfaithfulness and sin remembered against it us. But, how sad it will be to get there and not to have all of our past service for God not remembered because we turned away later in our lives to serve the cause of sin and error. To have all of our past sacrifices, deeds, and faithfulness to count for nothing! I can not think of anything more tragic. Let each of us examine himself and "take heed lest he fall".

God has given each of us a "second chance" (and most of us a third, fourth, fifth, etc., etc.) - let's not waste it in the final analysis. Let us not assume that God (though rich in mercy) will judge us with the same sentimentality and nostalgia that so often characterizes the judgment of our brethren. We certainly would be foolish to risk our souls on such presumption.

† Scripture quotations from the New King James Version.

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All articles are written by the editor unless otherwise indicated.

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### SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

Sunday Morning Bible Classes... 9:45 A.M.  
Sunday Morning Assembly.....10:45 A.M.  
Sunday Night Assembly..... 6:00 P.M.  
Wednesday Morning Bible Class..10:00 A.M.  
Wednesday Night Bible Classes.. 7:30 P.M.

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Second Class  
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