

“Churches of Christ”

In the days of the apostles, each congregation of Christians was to be so patterned after the Will of Christ that it would be a church “of Christ” and not a human organization. The congregations belonged to Christ, being authorized by Him, and constructed according to His Divine Will. Hence, Paul said, “the churches of Christ salute you” (Romans 16:16). They would not have been “churches of Christ” if they had been the inventions of human wisdom, and built according to some pattern gotten up by man, or set of men. To be “churches of Christ” back then, those congregations had to believe in and follow Christ (Matthew 16:24). They had to accept Christ as their great head and lawgiver (Colossians 1:18, 24; Ephesians 5:23). They had to accept His doctrine and guidance in all religious activity, else they could not have been “churches of Christ” (Romans 16: 16).

Built by Christ

Christ built the church. He said, “Upon this rock I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18). Of course, Christ built the kind of church that He wanted His church to be. He certainly knew what sort of church He wanted, and was able to so construct it that He would be pleased with it. The church was typified by the earthly tabernacle which was made “according to the pattern” God gave (Hebrews 8:5). Since it was to be a type of the spiritual tabernacle which the Lord pitched, and not man, it was built according to the “pattern.” Hence, God had a certain kind of church in mind when He gave the type of it in the Old Testament (Hebrews 10:1).

Jerusalem Church

The church at Jerusalem was the first congregation of the Lord’s church ever to exist. It had its *beginning* on Pentecost, after the resurrection of

Christ when the Holy Spirit came from heaven to guide the apostles into all Truth (Acts 11:15; Luke 24:46-49; John 16:13). Christ had said, “I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18). The Jerusalem church being the first congregation built, it was the fulfillment of the Lord’s promise to build His church. It was the church of Christ. It was the *pattern* by which all other congregations were to be fashioned, as the tabernacle which was a type of it was built according to the “pattern” (Hebrews 8:5). The Jerusalem church is the mother church.

Church Reproduced

The Gospel which began to be preached in its fullness on Pentecost, in Jerusalem, was to go to all nations (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-49; Acts 1:8; Acts 2). This mother congregation was to be a going, growing concern in the world. It was to be a fountain from which a great stream of blessings was to flow into all the world, ever deepening and widening to the enrichment of human souls. Hence, a member of the Jerusalem church, namely Philip, who later was called an *evangelist*, went to Samaria and “preached Christ unto them” (Acts 8:5). When they believed, they were baptized, both men and women (Acts 8:12). The Lord added them to the church as he had added those who obeyed the Gospel at Jerusalem (Acts 2:41, 47). This was the beginning of the church in Samaria. Furthermore, this was the church “of Christ,” the same as the church at Jerusalem. The two congregations were simply “churches of Christ” (Romans 16:16). Neither one of them was a religious sect or denomination. They were not founded upon the doctrines and commandments of men. It is true that Phillip preached the Word, and started this church in this place, but it was not a Philip-ite Church. It was not a new sort of church, but a reproduction of the church in Jerusalem. If Philip had taken wheat seed from Jerusalem to Samaria and sown it, the re-

sult would have been wheat just like that which grew back in Jerusalem. It would not have produced a new kind of wheat. “Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God” (Luke 8:11). “The sower soweth the word” (Mark 4:14). It is called “The word of the kingdom” (Matthew 13:19). Like other seed, the Word of God produces after its kind (Genesis 1:1-12; Galatians 6:7). It simply made those who believed and lovingly obeyed it members of the church of Christ in Jerusalem. Additionally, it could produce nothing but Christians in Samaria, who, when saved, were added to the church. They did not become Philip-ites. Neither did they become sectarians in any sense. The same Word now will make people members of the same church. A congregation now built upon Christ, in the same way, is the church of Christ in a given community. A plurality of such congregations are simply “churches of Christ” (Romans 16:16).

Church at Corinth

As another example of the many that might be chosen, Paul took this same Gospel and preached it in Corinth, “and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized” (Acts 18:8). This made them the “church of God” or “body of Christ” at Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:1-2; 12:27). They did not become Paul-ites, neither was the church Paul planted at Corinth a Paul-ite church. Seed always reproduces after its kind, and the Word of God can never start anything in any place other than the church of Christ. Such congregations as are built upon Him, and constructed according to His doctrine, are called “churches of Christ” (Romans 16:16). However, if Philip and Paul had gone out and gotten them a human creed, and a human system of doctrine, with a man-made organization tying the congregations together, one sect following Philip and wearing his name, and the other denomination following Paul and wearing his name, such congregations would

not have been “churches of Christ,” for Christ was not the author of such churches. Neither is He the author of such now. A perverted Gospel is not the Gospel of Christ, neither is a humanly invented church the church of Christ. Philip and Paul preached the same Gospel, being guided by the same Holy Spirit, and the result was the same “churches of Christ.”

“Churches of Christ” Now

Any now who preach, believe, and practice identically what inspired preachers believed, taught, and practiced in the first century, without addition or subtraction, or any other change, will be nothing but Christians, and the church of Christ in a given community. We have no right to wear the name of some man, though he may have taught us the Truth. Even if Paul were here and had taught us and started our congregation, it would be sinful to wear his name (1 Corinthians 1:10-13; Acts 11:26; 26: 18; 1 Peter 4:16). Furthermore, it is religious intolerance and persecution to try to force those who are determined to be Christians only, to wear some human religious name. It is also a plain violation of the golden rule (Matthew 7:12). One could never produce a Bentley car by properly assembling genuine Ford parts, without any change, or deviation from the purpose of the inventor of those parts and the Ford car. Neither can any man or set of men, ever produce a denomination, or anything but “churches of Christ” by assembling all parts of his doctrine, as he gave it, and putting all items of his teaching and worship into loving obedience on the part of the people in a given community.

No Changes Permitted

There are to be no changes in the doctrine and teaching of Christ (1 Timothy 1:3; 2 John 9; Matthew 15:9; Jude 3; Revelation 22:18-19). This principle was intended to keep the church one and the same through the ages. Christ

wanted His church to remain as He built it. Any desire, or attempt, to change the church from what it was in New Testament times shows one to be dissatisfied with the church as Christ built it (Matthew 16:18). Christ has given no man any authority whatsoever to change His church from what it was when He built it. All authority from Christ is now in the New Testament (John 16:13; 17:8, 14; Matthew 16:19). This Book does not authorize anything but “churches of Christ” (Romans 16:16). Only such congregations patterned after the “churches of Christ” in the New Testament are “churches of Christ” now. A church ceases to be “of Christ” when it ceases to be fashioned by the will and authority “of Christ.” A thing cannot be of God, or of Christ, which is contrary to the Will of God and of Christ. A Masonic Lodge is built upon the principles and teaching of Free Masonry, not upon those of the Odd Fellows, or the Elks, etc. It all depends upon following the old, or original. It is not proper to compare a given congregation with congregations of the days of Luther, or Calvin, or Smith, or Wesley. This is sure to lead into error. The only proper comparison is: is the church of which I am a member in my community identical with “the churches of Christ” in the days of the apostles (Romans 16:16)? “Make all things according to the pattern” (Hebrews 8:5).

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