

# *What is a Church of Christ 2*

## **Benevolence**

We began our discussion in our first lesson by establishing that there is only one Church that is accepted by the Lord and which will be delivered to the Father when Christ comes again.

*Eph 4:4-5*

**1**

4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

We saw the danger of adding to or taking away from the teachings of our Lord...

*Matt 15:8-9*

**2**

8 'This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far away from Me. 9 'But in vain do they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.' "

And, we began a discussion on...

**3**

### *"What DEFINES a Church of Christ"*

There are over 1500 recognized so-called churches out there. But God says there is only one. Now. Let's make appoint here, that isn't the credo of the Church of Christ, that we are the only ones that will be saved. The foolishness of that statement is beyond understanding. Man has no say in the matter, none. Man doesn't get to decide who is saved and who isn't. Salvation is dependent on two things...

**4**

- 1) God's Plan
- 2) Man's response to that Plan

It truly is that basic. God established a process by which man can be saved. That process is in place and has been for over 2000 years. It hasn't changed and it isn't going to. God has done everything God is going to do, now it's up to us to decide if we are going to be a part of His plan or not. As we talked about in our opening lesson, the importance of the Church has nothing to do, in the specific, with us, and while the Church is made up of individuals, it is the kingdom of promise from Daniel and will endure until Christ comes to take her home, regardless of whether we as individuals succeed in our efforts to follow God.

Friends, you and I are not necessarily guaranteed a home in heaven, but the Church most assuredly is. Doesn't it just make common sense to be a part of it? That's God's plan. Man follows the process that God has in place and comes to God through Christ, being forgiven of his sin, and then the Lord adds him to the Church...

*Acts 2:47*

**5**

47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

The Church, by definition, is the saved. Now back to the original point. Is the Church of Christ going to be the only one saved? According to the scriptures, the answer is an emphatic yes. All the saved are added to the Church by the Lord, and that doesn't leave any room for anything else, now does it. This isn't to be harsh or even dogmatic, but it is a faithful acceptance of the Truth of God's Word. The importance of being in the Church is obvious, that's where the saved are. That said, again stating the obvious, it just makes sense to make sure that the Church we align ourselves with, is the right one, the one that God will receive to a home eternal.

That's the purpose behind this series. God gives a blueprint for His Church and it is our responsibility to follow it.

Remember what Christ says in...

**Matt 15:13**

**6**

**13** But He answered and said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be rooted up.

God's standard defines what His Church looks like. This standard, when followed, governs the words and actions of the follower, making them unique in the eyes of the world. The world sees and recognizes the difference in how those who follow the standard live their lives according to it. The standard defines the follower as a disciple or Christian. We understand the dynamic of how this occurs. We see a car broke down on the side of the road and think it as a Ford, we see someone wearing a football uniform and recognize them to be a football player. But do you see the problem? The car might be a Chevy or Dodge and the person wearing the uniform might be going to a Halloween party. On the surface, we may look at someone who seems to fit the standard and decide that they are indeed what they seem to be, when in reality they are not. The world recognizes many as Christians because it is using a perverted standard. As true as this dynamic is with individuals, it is also true with Churches.

What we are going to do in this series is to look at the things that defined the New Testament Church as the Church of Christ.

**Rom 16:16**

**7**

**16** Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

Whatever the things are that the standard used to define the Church of Christ in New Testament times, those things are still the criteria that define the Church today. For a Church today to be a true Church of Christ, it must have the same characteristics of, practice the same things as, and adhere to, the same standard as did the Church then.

A while back we looked at a series of lessons on the five acts of worship, preaching / teaching, singing, giving of our means, praying, and taking of the Lord's Supper. We will be reviewing those acts as a part of this series in the coming weeks. Briefly, these are the most obvious of the characteristics that a true Church of Christ engages in, things that are seen in example and commanded in doctrine. When we look into the Holy scriptures we see the Church engaged in preaching and teaching, we see them praying, we read the commandments to sing, take the Lord's supper, and to give, these are the acts of worship seen in the New Testament Church, the standard by which any Church today is measured. I want to make this point absolutely certain. Regardless of what the world says, or what people say, a Church is only acceptable in its worship to God if it follows the standard, neither adding to nor taking away from it. A Church can only be defined as a true Church of Christ if it follows the standard which defines a true church of Christ.

In **Eph 5** and **Col 3** we are commanded to sing, a specific command that does not include playing a musical instrument. So if a church of today does not participate in singing as a group, they don't fit the standard as seen in the New Testament. In the same regard, a group that does participate in congregational singing but chooses to add to the standard and include musical instruments, they also do not fit the standard. Just as there many who call themselves Christians, as defined by a perverted standard, any group can call themselves a Church of Christ by a perverted standard. Only those individuals who fit the true standard are Christians and only those groups that fit the true standard are Churches of Christ.

When looking for a church to attend, what are the criteria that we should use to decide which one is the one we need to align ourselves with, or more importantly, which one is the one that meets the criteria God has set in place for His Church. Remember that the Church in the New Testament is described as the Church of God no less than 8 times and make no mistake, as we saw last week in **Matt 15**, if God did not plant it, it will be rooted up and cast into the fire. What do we look for?

**8**

Does the church you are looking at preach and teach God's word, and only God's word, in its entirety, neither adding to nor taking away from that truth?

**9**

Does it sing praises to God, using only its combined voice to sing those praises without adding to God's commandment adding musical instruments?

**10**

Does it pray to God through our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ without redirecting its prayers through any man or woman? Does it avoid vain repetition as it comes before its God?

- 11** Does it partake of the Lord's Supper on the first day of every week, not just once a year, or on special occasions, remembering what our Messiah did for us?  
Does it engage in the collection from the Saints, on the first day of the week, in order to supply the needs to fulfill the work of the Church as seen in the scriptures?
- 12** Where does the Lord's money go and why? What are the things that a Church does, or can do and still fit the standard? These are some of the things that we will try and look at in this series.

As early as the late 1800's a new movement was beginning in religion. The following is an article on the institutional church movement...

**13** *The Institutional Church Movement was a turn-of-the-century effort by Protestant Social Gospel leaders to regain ground the church, in their perception, had lost particularly among the laboring poor. For clarification, the writers of this article are including all churches in their statement, while in fact the movement began primarily with denominational churches. While pioneered by William A. Muhlenberg and Thomas K. Beecher, the first significant expression of the idea was by William S. Rainsford's St. George's Episcopal Church in New York, beginning in 1882. Rainsford began by eliminating pew rents and then seeking to expand the use of the church building to each day of the week. By the 1890 s, Institutional Church programs included banks, game rooms, youth clubs, soup kitchens, kindergartens, deaconess homes, gymnasium classes, employment services, food and clothing dispensaries, sewing and cooking classes, clinics, hospitals and colleges—one of the more famous being Temple University in Philadelphia.*

**(Dictionary of Christianity in America)**

Which one of these things would you describe as evil or bad or even just not a good thing? Keep that thought in mind for a minute.

The first real issue with regard to institutionalism in the Church of Christ showed it's ugly face in about the 1930's, but didn't really become a major issue until the 40's and on into the 60's. I truly don't like stating it that way, because any issue that pulls even a single congregation of God's people away from His standard is a major issue, but in terms of the issue spreading throughout the Church, if you will, the dates appear to be pretty accurate historically. As the issue grew and the debates surrounding it grew, two sides to the issue became very clear, those who wanted to support institutionalism and those who found no authority for the practice in the scriptures, or institutionalists and non-institutionalists.

Some quick definitions, if you will. The term "**non-institutional**" refers to a distinct understanding among many within the Church of Christ who do not agree with the support of para-church organizations, that's any organization other than the Church itself, ie. (colleges, orphans' homes, mission societies, etc.) by local congregations. That group contends that the New Testament has no authority whatsoever for the Lord's Church to support such institutions. Instead they feel that it is a responsibility and duty of the individual to assist those of the world that are in need and the Church has a limited responsibility to take care of those that are of the Church. These groups became separated from pro-institutional groups because of their stand, and the division became two distinct segments of by the 1960s. Whether a local congregation supports the "sponsoring church" or institution custom is one way to determine whether or not that group meets the standard as defined by God's Word. The congregations that advocate financial support or the pooling of resources for the benefit of other entities or organized external evangelical efforts are called "sponsoring churches".

The label "**institutional**" refers to those churches who either try to find authority or think that authority is not necessary to take funds from the Lord's treasury to support, and I love this term, para-church organizations. Not church organizations, but almost church organizations.

For the younger ones who didn't go through this turmoil, the concept is this.

By definition an institution is...

## In·sti·tu·tion

**14**

- 1) A society or organization founded for a religious, educational, social, or similar purpose

2) An organization providing for special needs

To try and illustrate what happens. Here is an organization, an institution, designed to help a specific group of people, what its function is isn't relevant, nor is whether or not what it supplies a good thing. Good is not the issue, authority is. That is exactly what Christ says in...

**Matt 7:15-23**

**15**

**15** "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. **16** "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they? **17** "Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit. **18** "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. **19** "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. **20** "So then, you will know them by their fruits. **21** "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. **22** "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' **23** "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'

We might truly think that because our perception of something is that it is good, it automatically is what God wants us to do. The point that Christ makes is that good just isn't good enough. Good must be accompanied with a thus sayeth the Lord, otherwise it is insufficient and is a function of Lawlessness.

**James 1:25**

**16**

**25** But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does.

James makes the same point as does Christ; man is blessed in his efforts only when he abides by the perfect Law of Liberty, being both a hearer and a doer.

Continuing with the illustration then; This organization accepts support from a variety of sources. A local church decides that what the organization does is a good work and begins to send funds to the organization to help support it.

The problem is that there is no authority to take funds from the oversight of the Elders of the local congregation and place them under the authority of a different organization to do with as they please.

Brethren, I would love to be able to take you to the passages that tell us, in the specific, that God's Church does not support outside institutions regardless of the good they do. I can't, those passages are not there. Neither, though, is the authority to help support them, this is where the concept of adding to or taking away comes into play. The examples and commandments we see in the scriptures are very straight forward. We are commanded to lay by in store on the first day of every week, as we have been prospered.

**1 Cor 16:1-4**

**17**

**1** Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. **2** On the first day of every week let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come. **3** And when I arrive, whomever you may approve, I shall send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem; **4** and if it is fitting for me to go also, they will go with me.

We see one of the purposes for this laying by in store in the uses to which it was put to work.

**Rom 15:24-27**

**18**

**25** but now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints. **26** For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. **27** Yes, they were pleased to do so, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things.

We see Paul taking the collection that he had received from the churches in Macedonia and Achaia directly to Jerusalem to help with the relief of the needy saints there, with emphasis on “Needy Saints”. Nowhere do we see the work of the Church, either in example or commandment, as being the help or relief of those that are not saints, Christians by definition of God’s standard. If there wasn’t the issue of authority, there is still the problem that comes with these sponsoring organizations, the control of the funds is lost, and those funds can easily go where there is no authority for the Church to go.

*1 Tim 5:3-4*

**19**

**3** Honor widows who are widows indeed; **4** but if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family, and to make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God.

*1 Tim 5:9-10*

**20**

**9** Let a widow be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old, having been the wife of one man, **10** having a reputation for good works; and if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has assisted those in distress, and if she has devoted herself to every good work.

There are some points to be made here. For the Church to be able to help;

**21**

- 1) The widow to be helped must be a Christian
- 2) If there is family, it is the family’s responsibility to help first
- 3) The concept of a list or role of those to be helped is scriptural
- 4) The work of benevolence is assigned to the local Church and not to an organization set up to do that work.

*James 1:27*

**22**

**27** This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

The same holds true for all needy saints. The Church has no authority to pass its responsibility on to any organization to fulfill the work God has given it to do.

It might seem to be a very basic principle, take care of your own, but in the name of doing good, many that call themselves Churches of Christ have decided to use others to fulfill their God given responsibility to show benevolence to needy saints.

How does God’s standard define the work of benevolence?

**23**

- 1) The Church is to help needy saints.
- 2) It is to send the funds directly to those individuals or congregations that are in need of such support.
- 3) There is neither example nor commandment to send funds to a para-church organization to fulfill that need.
- 4) Recipients are to be qualified by the Elders of that local congregation as to whether they should receive support.

If a church does anything other than these things, it does not fit the pattern as set by God in His standard and cannot be a true Church of Christ.

Ultimately the decision is ours, yours and mine, as to whether a Church is practicing the proscriptions of the New Testament Church. Ultimately it is up to us, to rightly divide God’s truth so that we know that we are adhering to those proscriptions in God’s standard of being a true child of God and a member of the true Church of Christ.