

CHURCH of CHRIST

It is interesting to note how many religions and denominations of 'Christianity' are listed in the encyclopedias ... but the church of Christ is not even listed in many of them. The World Book does have an entry separate from the listing of Christianity and this is what the 1960 issue said...

"Churches of Christ" are a group of religious congregations that trace their beginnings to the times of the apostles. Members believe that the first Church of Christ was established on Pentecost after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. They claim that the church spread throughout the Roman world and then declined until the 1800's. Then Thomas Campbell (1763-1854), his son Alexander (1788-1866), and their associates restored it.

Doctrines. The Churches of Christ regard Christ as the founder, head, and Savior of the church. They regard the Campbells as restorers of the primitive church. They contend that the word of God is the seed of the kingdom. When it is faithfully preached and obeyed, without addition or subtraction, it will produce true Christians, or the church of Christ.

The churches consider the whole Bible to be inspired by God, but believe that the Old Testament was binding only in earlier times. They accept the New Testament as their sole rule of faith and practice. They maintain that the New Testament sets forth faith, repentance, confession, and baptism as the conditions of salvation. Their items of worship, practiced each Lord's Day, include singing, preaching, contributing money, and observing the Lord's Supper.

Organization. There are about 18,000 independent Churches of Christ (1960), with about 15,000 preachers. A group of elders presides over each church, and a group of deacons serves each. Most of the churches are in the southern and southwestern United States, with the largest number in Texas and Tennessee. The churches conduct extensive evangelical programs. They support about 200 workers in more than 50 countries. They also operate 4 senior colleges, 10 junior colleges, more than 20 Bible Schools, and several orphanages and old age homes. The church publishes a number of periodicals and religious papers. For membership in the United States, see Religion (table)." BC Goodpasture

It may be ironic that the church belonging to Christ is not easily identified in today's society. Each congregation being 'autonomous' having no central organization or 'spokesman' does make the Lord's church a little peculiar. The church that has developed as a fellowship of believers with the term 'church of Christ' is the singular form of "*churches of Christ*" found in **Romans 16:16**. This is the legal name used to establish a legal congregation according to the laws of the land, and may be the most descriptive term of who the church belongs to, but it is not the exclusive name given in the Holy Scriptures. In **Corinthians 1:2** it is "*church of God*" **Hebrews 12:23** calls it "*church of the Firstborn*" and in **Acts 20:28 ASV** it is "*church of the Lord*" (King James Version used unless otherwise specified.) The term used most often, especially in the book of Acts, is "*the church*". **"Church of Christ" is not only a name, it describes a possession**, and it still belongs to Jesus, the Son of God.

A scriptural New Testament church is a spiritual institution of divine origin. The membership roll is kept in a book, not on the books of the local congregations on this earth, but in "*the lamb's (Jesus) book of life*" mentioned in **Revelation 13:8** and **Revelation 20:15**.

All creation and history (His-story) exist with Christ in view. "*Who was foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world, but was manifested at the end of time for your sake.*" **1 Peter 1; 20.** "*The Lamb*

slain from the foundation of the world." **Revelation 13:8** and "According to His own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time eternal." **2 Timothy 1:9**. The church was planned by God from the beginning of time. In **Ephesians 3: 9-11** it is recorded. "And to make men see what is the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ; To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God., according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord:"

During all the centuries before Christ, the church was only a plan in God's mind, but age by age, God prepared man for the time when the church would become a reality. Remember **Genesis 3:15** and **Genesis 12:1-3** when God promised the seed of the woman and when God called Abraham and promised that though his descendants all people would be blessed. The Hebrew prophets foresaw the coming church, often described as a kingdom. (**2 Samuel 7:12-16** -David's seed; **Isaiah 9:7**; **Daniel 7:14**) It would bear the design of its Divine Originator, never become outdated, and be universal, unrestricted by country, politics, racial, or social barriers.

Christ was born as a man, as predicted by many prophecies recorded in the Old Testament, and somewhere around the year 26 or 30 AD (depending on whose calendar you use) while in the city of Caesarea Philippi (Baniyas) He announced that He would build His church. "And the gates of hell (Hades) shall not prevail against it." **Matthew 16:16-19**. Less than a year later He was betrayed, condemned, crucified, and buried, (**Mark 14:15**) but on the third day He was raised from the dead (**Luke 24:1:35**). Seven weeks later after His resurrection and ascension into heaven the predicted church was established in Jerusalem on the Jew's day of Pentecost. (Pentecost was the day to remember the slain lamb back in the Exodus of Israel from Egypt and Jesus was that final slain 'lamb'.)

To this world wide-audience the Gospel - the Good News that a new age had dawned, the Christian age, Jesus was proclaimed as the resurrected Lord and Christ. (**Acts 2:22-36**) On that day 3000+ persons believed that Jesus was Lord and Christ, and they gladly obeyed the command to be baptized. On that day the church, the Kingdom that God had long promised had come. (**Colossians 1:13**; **1 Thessalonians 2:12**, **Hebrews 12:28**). The church is the total of all people of every age who have obeyed Christ and committed themselves to Him.

Christ and the church are inseparable, He is the head, and the church is the body. (**Ephesians 1:22-23**; **Ephesians 2:16**) The head depends on the body to carry out its functions and the head unifies and coordinates the different organs of the body. In **John 14:26** Jesus told His apostles (disciples) that the Holy Ghost would be sent to teach them all things, and bring all things to their remembrance that He had said to them. The apostles and disciples put to writing the New Testament which is the rule and practice of the church.

Almost twenty centuries have passed. Many things have changed, including man's ideas about the church. To some the church is a building, some think of it as a "denomination or religion sect." A dictionary may list as its first definition of "church " as a "building for public worship", but the church is people, those who follow the same message as proclaimed in the

first century. The response to the message must still be the same. Man today must do the same things that the people of the first century had to do to become members of Christ's body. The church today is still

governed by Christ, its head. Worship is to be expressed in the same acts of faith and obedience as was the practice then. God's plan for His church is just as relevant to modern man.

But this is the space age; this is an age of progress, an age of explosion in knowledge. Man looks ahead, not backward, he is moving forward in science, and out into space. Why should He have a church that is 2000 years old? The life of Christ, His teachings, His death and resurrection were all happenings of the same century in which the church began. Looking back to Christ as man has done over the past twenty centuries has been the most progressive thing man could do. Christ is always contemporary, up to date in every generation. Most of the schools and hospitals that have caused the 'knowledge exposition' were formed and begun by 'Christian' organizations. Christ has not changed. (**Hebrews 13:8**) What He did for man's salvation was done completely, never to be repeated, once and for all.

But what about Man? Has he changed? Fundamentally, man is still the same. He has the same basic needs and desires, still has the same drives and ambitions, still the same capacity for doing good or evil, still looks for happiness, and still likes to be in control of his destiny.

Man's condition has not changed. Like Adam and Eve, like Aaron who made the golden calf, and the people of Israel who corrupted themselves in every generation going after gods of their own making, like all the people of the churches in the New Testament era who distorted God's Word in every way, man has discovered no cure for sin and are still influenced by that 'evil one'. The sins of Babel, Jerusalem, Corinth, and Rome are the same as the sins of today's Tokyo, London, New York, Nashville, Tennessee, and your town. As in the first century, mankind needs Christ on which to base life. We still need direction, purpose, unity, and the love of Christ in our life.

As we look at whether 'One Religion is as Good as Another', let's look at some of these differences. Christianity is the only religion still in existence founded by God. It is the only religion where its head and founder are not in the grave. It is the only religion that can remove sin from the 'Book of Life'. It offers eternal life with God and a better life on this earth; a peace that passeth understanding. Christ is able to meet man's needs.

It takes faith and courage to believe this story that began with Adam and Eve and ends with you in heavenly places. This is especially true because popular beliefs, concepts, and impression of 'church' are far removed from what the church was established to be. It will continue to take faith and courage to move 'against the tide'. It took faith and courage for followers of Christ to move through every age of persecutions and trials. It took faith and courage for Paul and Peter and the other disciples to bring the word to their generation and to ours. It took blood and sweat for Christ to fulfill His love for us and to rescue us from the consequences of our sins. But the glory of Christ and the church is reason enough. Faith and courage grow out of knowing Christ as Lord.

First Thessalonians 5:21, *"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."* **Romans 12:2**, *"Be not conformed to this world: but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is good and acceptable, and perfect will of God."*

James 3:16 to 4:10, *"For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy, and the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace. From whence come wars and fightings among you? Do they not come even of your lust that war in your members? You lust and you have not: you kill and desire to have, and cannot obtain: you*

fight and war; yet you have not, because you ask not. You ask, and receive not, because you ask amiss, that you may consume it upon your lusts. You adulterers and adulteresses, don't you know that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be friend of the world is enemy of God. Do you think that the scripture says in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy. But he giveth more grace . Wherefore he said, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. Submit yourself therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: Jet your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up."

Life's greatest tragedy is not losing a game. Losing a sale, or health, wealth, or even life itself. Life's greatest loss would be losing the gift of eternal life offered through Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and the seed of the woman, promised as Savior from the beginning, after man's sin and rebellion against God. Without Him there is no meaning to life or existence on earth. Without Him we have no advocate before God and would have to pay the penalty for our sins with separation from God eternally. Without Him there is no source of our daily bread or our spiritual bread, or sustenance; no inheritance with God, and no hope.

Is there any other religion that connects us to God? Is there another religion that can be traced to our origins, and God's dealings with mankind as recorded in the Old and New Testaments of the Holy Bible? Is there another religion that offers life after death forever with God in a heavenly place prepared for us, and has provided the sacrifice for sin? Is there another religion that forgives sins and brings us through the sufferings we endure on this planet? **Christianity is not about religion. It is about a living Savior and a relationship with a living God.**

Was it Alexander Campbell who began the churches of Christ 150 some years ago? Was it Jesus the Savior, the Christ who originated His church? If so, when? How can your answer to this question be proved? Is it still possible that a church which originated in the first century could exist in its purity?

Why are there so many denominations in what is called Christianity today? Are these denominations still a part of the whole? Was Jesus the founder of these denominations? If Jesus founded only one church, how can I tell which one it is? ^What are His requirements to be a part of His church? How many denominations does it take to make a whole church like the original? What about Jews? Muslims? Hindus? What will the eternal judge of mankind say about who will be saved to live with God and who will not? Could it be true that one must believe in Jesus as the Son of God and the Savior of mankind to be saved, and have forgiveness of sins? What is meant by believing in Christ? Does belief require obedience to the commandments of Jesus? Is it important what we believe? Is one church or belief system as good as another?