



Aren't All Churches Part Of The Church Of Christ?

DISCOVERING GOD'S WORD BIBLE STUDY SERIES

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Aren't all churches part of the church of Christ? That is, don't all denominational groups and (so-called) "Christian" religious organizations make up the one body of Jesus Christ (the church of Christ)? The religious world often affirms this to be true; but, what does the Bible say about this question? The Bible is clear on this matter. Let's observe how the Bible answers this question.

Christ Only Established One Church

Christ only promised to build one church. In Matthew 16:18-19, Jesus taught: "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

Notice two things from this passage. First, Jesus was only going to build one church ("My church" – singular). Second, this church is the kingdom that was prophesied in the Old Testament scriptures (notice how the terms "church" and "kingdom of heaven" are used interchangeably in these two verses). A study of the prophecies about this kingdom would reveal that God only promised to establish one kingdom – not many different kingdoms.

Then, not only was there just one church promised; but, only one church was actually established during New Testament times. Notice that this church had not yet been established in Matthew 16 (it was still spoken of as being in the future – "I will build My church"). In Acts chapter 2, this changes. From the end of Acts 2 and forward, Christ's church is spoken of as being in existence. For instance, Acts 2:47 says, "praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved."

Although many local churches were established throughout the book of Acts (local congregations of God's disciples meeting in particular communities), there was only one church established in the "universal" sense. That is, there was only one church to which all of the

Christians in the New Testament belonged! When Paul wrote Ephesians, he said that there is only “one body” (Ephesians 4:4) – and that this “one body” is the church (Ephesians 1:22-23).

The scriptures clearly teach us that there is only one body/church that belongs to Jesus Christ. But, who is part of Christ’s church?

Who Is Part Of Christ’s Church?

Those who would claim that all (so-called) “Christian” churches are part of the church of Christ would likely agree with the things we’ve just established. So, we need to begin learning about who is part of Christ’s church (the church of Christ).

The Greek word that is usually translated as “church” is the word “ekklesia.” It refers to an assembly or congregation. For instance, in Acts 19, it is used in a non-religious sense to refer to the assembly of people who had been rioting in the city of Ephesus (see verse 41 for the word translated “assembly” in the NKJV).

When this word is used in a religious sense, it is used in reference to Christ’s congregation of the saved. That is, His church is His group/collection of the saved – as salvation is only “in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 2:10). So, only those who are saved are part of His church – and those who are not among the saved are not among Christ’s church!

Who Are The Saved?

Since it is only those who are saved who are part of Christ’s church, you must recognize what the Bible teaches concerning who will (and who will not) be saved.

First, let’s understand some things taught in the scriptures concerning who will *not* be saved (therefore, they are not part of Christ’s church).

- **Those who are living in their sin.** The Bible teaches that the wages of sin is eternal spiritual death in Hell fire (i.e. Romans 6:23). This is true because our sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:1-2). So, those who are living according to the sinful desires of the flesh “will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:19-21).
- **Those who do not obey God.** There are many who believe in God and Christ, profess to be “Christians,” and even do many good works – who simply do not obey God’s commandments. Jesus said that these individuals will be eternally condemned (Matthew 7:21-23). James said that only believing in Christ is not enough for eternal salvation; instead, you must also be obedient to God’s instructions (James 2:14-26). Paul also made it clear that those who do not know God and those who do not obey the gospel of Jesus Christ will “be punished with everlasting destruction” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).
- **Those who have become Christians, but have not remained faithful to God.** Some obey God initially; but, they do not remain faithful to Him throughout their lives. And,

even though they were once saved and part of Christ's church, they have now separated themselves from God by living in their sins (1 John 1:5-7). Again, the wages of their sin is eternal spiritual death in Hell (Romans 6:23). In fact, the Bible says that they have "become estranged from Christ" and have "fallen from grace" (Galatians 5:4).

Second, let's understand what the Bible says concerning who *will* be saved (these are part of Christ's Church).

- **Those who have no sin.** Sin is what separates us from God and causes us to be spiritually lost (Isaiah 59:1-2; Romans 6:23). Therefore, those who have no sin are in a saved condition. Only those who have never reached a point of personal accountability are innocent of sin (i.e. infants, young children, some who are mentally handicapped). All the rest of us have sinned and fallen short of God's glory (Romans 3:23).
- **Those who have been obedient to God's plan for saving mankind.** God has given mankind the opportunity to be saved. However, He *does* require that we obey His instructions in order to be saved – and be part of His church. He requires: That you hear His word (Romans 10:17), that you believe (John 8:24), that you repent of your sins (Acts 17:30), that you confess the Lord Jesus (Romans 10:9-10), that you be baptized (immersed) in water (Mark 16:16), and that you remain faithful until death (Revelation 2:10). Please note that baptism is the point at which we are forgiven of our sins and are counted among the saved in Christ's church (Acts 2:38; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:27).

The Problem

Only these are part of Christ's church. However, the problem is that the overwhelming majority of (so-called) "Christian" churches today pervert some aspect of Bible teaching – and do not follow "the faith of the gospel" (Philippians 1:27). Consider some areas in which this is true.

- **Most churches do not accurately teach God's plan of salvation.** We have just considered the God-prescribed "steps to salvation." However, most religious organizations today have changed this plan of salvation. Many churches will teach that salvation comes by faith *only*. Many churches teach the "Sinner's Prayer." Some churches practice "infant baptism." Many churches practice "baptism" by sprinkling or pouring rather than only by immersion. Some teach that it is impossible to fall from the grace of God after you have been saved by it. And, nearly all churches today teach that baptism is *not* necessary for salvation. Churches that do not accurately teach God's plan of salvation simply cannot be part of the church of Christ (because they have not been saved)!
- **Most churches teach some false doctrine.** All churches do not believe, teach, and practice their (so-called) "Christianity" in the same way. That is a primary reason they are different churches (i.e. the Baptist Church does not believe, teach, or practice the exact same things as the Methodist Church). However, *all* of these different doctrines

cannot be right (because they teach conflicting things). Most churches are guilty of believing, teaching, and following *some* element of false doctrine. Some common false doctrines being promoted in churches today include: False teachings about salvation (as we have already discussed), inherited sin (the belief that we are born in sin), the miraculous indwelling of the Holy Spirit in Christians today (the belief that the Holy Spirit directly leads us apart from how He leads us through the word of God), premillennialism (the belief that Christ will reign on the earth for 1,000 years and establish an earthly kingdom), and ecumenism (the belief that all so-called “Christians” can believe and practice different things, while all still being acceptable to God). Churches that do not accurately teach Bible doctrine simply cannot be part of the church of Christ (because those who do not abide in the doctrine of Christ do not have God, 2 John 1:9-11)!

- **Most churches do not follow the pattern for local churches in the NT.** There is a pattern for local churches in the pages of the New Testament. Churches today have the responsibility to hold fast to that pattern (2 Timothy 1:13)! This pattern concerns the worship, the work, and the organizational structure of the local church. However, all man-made churches have strayed from this pattern. Some common areas in which this pattern has been perverted include: The use of instrumental music in worship, partaking of the Lord’s Supper only monthly, quarterly, or yearly, church sponsored social and recreational events (dinners, plays, field trips, etc.), women preachers, deacons, and elders, and church-supported human institutions (missionary societies, orphan homes, colleges, etc.). Churches that do not accurately follow the Bible pattern simply cannot be part of the church of Christ (because they have violated the instructions of God in the Holy Scriptures)!

Conclusion

Christ only established one church. Those who are being obedient to the instructions of God are those who are saved – and, consequently, part of this one church. Any religious organization (even though it claims to be “Christian”) that is not following God’s commandments, cannot be part of the church of Christ.

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