

Is The Church Indispensible To Christianity?

By E. V. SRYGLEY, JR.

Macon Preachers

Recently, on a TV panel discussion originating in Macon, Georgia, several preachers discussed this question: Is the church indispensable to Christianity?



In this article the reader is invited to examine material pertinent to this question.

Which Church?

The aforementioned panel members agreed that by the term "church" they meant the "church on the corner," or the local denomination.

Or, in other words, these men were asking whether the Baptist Church, or Methodist Church, etc., was absolutely necessary to the life of Christianity.

The Real Issue

Actually, the real issue involved here is not whether or not Christianity can live *without* these churches, but whether or not Christianity can live *WITH* them.

The question asked by the Macon preachers implies their assumption that all denominations have a perfect right to exist.

However, this assumption is entirely unwarranted and wholly without Bible proof. The man does not live who can justify by the Bible a division of professed Christians into different churches.

To the contrary, 1 Cor. 1:10-13 positively condemns what we know today as denominational Christianity.

The New Testament Church

It can be affirmed without fear of contradiction that the New Testament church IS indispensable to the life of Christianity.

It would be impossible to have Christianity without the church because Christians ARE THE CHURCH. See in this regard such passages as Acts 2:47; Eph. 5:23; 1 Cor. 12:27; Heb. 3:6.

What Is It?

Someone is sure to ask, "But what is the New Testament church?"

It is odd and unfortunate that whenever the term "church" is used, the minds of most people are confused.

Why should this be true of the term "church" when it is not true of other Bible words?

If neighbors are discussing the goodness of God does another who is a believer come along and ask, "But which God are you talking about?"

And even if a skeptic should ask, "Which God?" the reply would be, without any indication of confusion, "The Bible God."

Is there any misunderstanding among believers in the Bible when people speak of the New Testament Jesus or of the New Testament Spirit?

To the contrary, people grasp immediately the necessity of maintaining the concept of God, of Christ, and of the Spirit, that is presented in the writings of the apostles and inspired men.

What About the Church?

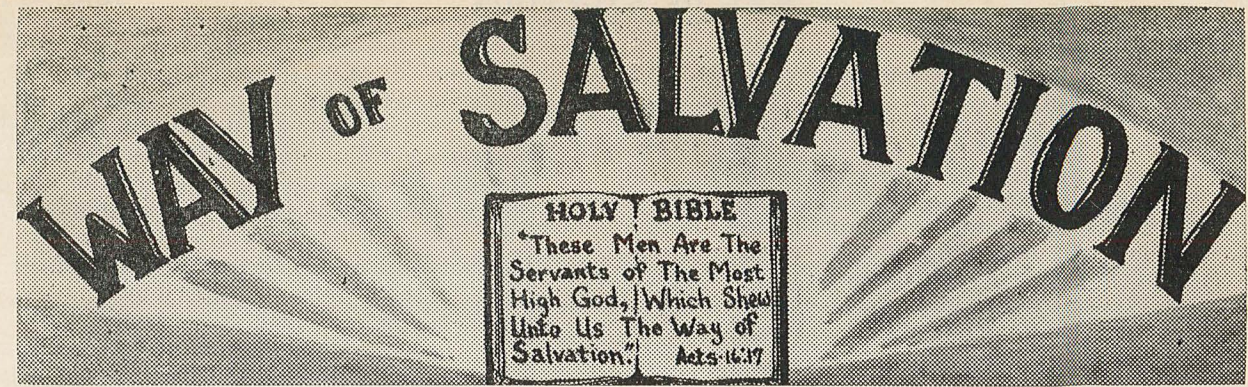
Therefore, since the meaning is perfectly clear when we speak of the New Testament God, or Jesus, or Spirit, why can't we, with equal ease, understand what is meant by the New Testament church?

If the New Testament God means the God presented in the New Testament, then what would the New Testament church mean?

And if our concept of God must be exactly what it was in the mind of Paul, then why must not my concept of the church be exactly what it was in the mind of Paul?

Why will people hold today the Bible view of God and yet steadfastly refuse today the Bible view of the church?

If today we believe in the Bible Jesus can't
If today we believe in the Bible Jesus, can't church?



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The Identity Of The New Testament Church

By Pervie Nichols

There are more than two hundred-fifty different religious bodies in America alone. Each claims to be the church of Christ, or a denomination of the church of Christ. Is Jesus the author of all these churches? Did He establish them? The church of Christ was built hundreds of years before these denominations were started. Is that church in existence today? If so, is it possible to identify it amid the conflicting voices of these denominational churches around us?



PERVIE NICHOLS

Since every counterfeit is an imitation of something genuine, somewhere there *must* be a true church that men have perverted in making their counterfeit churches. When Moses was about to make the tabernacle, God admonished him to "make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount." (Heb. 8:5). Even so, the church of Christ, the anti-type of the tabernacle, was built according to the Lord's specifications. The first church of Christ ever built is the true church; it is the pattern by which all other congregations are to be fashioned.

All denominations possess certain qualities which distinguish them from each other. And to properly identify them one must consult their respective creeds, manuals, disciplines, catechisms and articles of faith which describe them. Likewise, the New Testament church has marks which identify it. But its divine characteristics can be found only in the Holy Scriptures. Hence, to learn of that church one must consult the New Testament. It describes the church which existed in the first century as plainly as any modern denomination is described in its creed or manual!

But one who knows nothing of the descrip-

tion of that church cannot recognize it, even if it exists in his community. Therefore, to be able to properly identify the church of the New Testament one *must* become familiar with its identification marks.

Let us honestly consider some divine qualities of that church and compare it with the religious bodies about us. To be of divine origin they *must* possess the marks of the church revealed in the Bible. If they are different, only false doctrine and sin can account for the difference.

FOUNDATION

When Jesus asked His disciples: "But whom say ye that I am?" Peter answered, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Then Christ said, "And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church . . ." (Matt. 16:15-18). The Greek for "Peter" is *petros* (masculine gender, fragment of rock); the word "rock" is *petra* (feminine gender, a bedrock, a ledge of rock). The church is not built upon Peter (fragment of rock); it is built upon the solid ledge of rock, the unshakable truth expressed in Peter's confession: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matt. 16:16).

God promised to "lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation . . ." (Isa. 28:16). Peter applied this prophecy to Christ (I Pet. 2:6-8). He also said that Jesus "is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner." (Acts 4:11). Paul said, "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." (I Cor. 3:11). (See also Matt. 21:42; Mk. 12:10; Eph. 2:18-22.) So Christ is the foundation of the church. Therefore, any religious body that claims Peter or any other human as its foundation is

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not the New Testament church.

The church of Christ today possesses this mark of divine origin.

BUILDER

Jehovah said, "Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord" (Zech. 6:12). "The BRANCH" is Christ (Isa. 11:1-2; Jer. 23:5). "The temple of the Lord" is the church of Christ (1 Cor. 1:2, 3:16, 12:27; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 1:22-23). Hence, Christ was to build the church. He said, "... I will could not be the church of the Bible. quently did build it. Therefore, a church built by Luther, Calvin, Wesley, or some other man, could be the church of the Bible.

Whose church did the Lord build? Jesus built His church. Said He, "I will build my church." (Matt. 16:18). He purchased the material with His own blood. (Acts 20:28-R.V.; Eph. 5:25). It is "His Body" (Eph. 1:22-23). Since He and the Father are united (Jno. 17:10), the church also belongs to God (Gal. 1:13). So it is neither "my church" nor "your church."

How many churches did Jesus build? He built only one, for He said, "I will build my church" (singular in number) (Matt. 16:18). The church is the "body of Christ" (1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 1:22; Col. 1:18). The apostle who said there is "one God" also said, "There is one body" (Eph. 4:3-6), and "but one body" (1 Cor. 12:20). No one would be so ridiculous as to affirm that Christ had a plurality of physical bodies. And it's just as absurd to assert that Christ has a plurality of spiritual bodies (churches) over which He is head! There is but one kingdom of God on earth; but one church over which Christ is head; but one body of Christ. (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:20; Eph. 4:3-6).

Of course the New Testament does mention several congregations which were "churches of Christ" (Rom. 16:16), and "churches of God" (1 Cor. 11:16). But these were alike in faith, name, doctrine and practice; they were not denominations. A denomination is a religious body larger than a local church or congregation, yet smaller than the body of Christ, which includes all Christians. Jesus did not build denominations; He built His church.

The church of Christ today is patterned after the church Jesus built.

BIRTHDAY

1. Christ did not build His church during the lifetime of John the Baptist. We read of John's death in Matthew 14. After John's death Jesus said, "I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18). He did not say, "I have built my church," or, "I am now building my church." "I will build" is future tense.

2. Jesus did not build His church before His death. He, as the foundation, had to become "a tried stone" before being laid in Zion. (Isa. 28:16). He became the "tried stone" when He stood the supreme test in His death, burial and resurrection, thus proving Himself to be the Son of God with power. (Rom. 1:4). The church could not have been built before these events occurred.

When did the Lord establish His church or kingdom? It was established on the day of Pentecost following the ascension of Christ.

1. Before His ascension Jesus promised to send His apostles "power from on high" (Lk. 24:46-49; Jno. 16:13; Acts 1:8). And He said the kingdom would come with this power. (Mk. 9:1). Since the apostles received this power of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost after Christ ascended (Acts 2:1-4), the church or kingdom was established at that time.

2. Before Pentecost inspired men referred to the church or kingdom as being in the future. (Isa. 2:2-3; Dan. 2:44; Micah 4:1-13; Matt. 3:1-3, 4:17, 16:18; Mk. 15:43; Lk. 22:18, 23:42; Acts 1:5-9.) After that day it is always spoken of as being in existence. (Acts. 20:28; 1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:13; 1 Tim. 3:14-15; Heb. 12:28; Rev. 1:9).

3. On Pentecost about three thousand were added to the church, and the Lord added to it daily those being saved. (Acts 2:36-47). Since the church is the kingdom of Christ (Matt. 16:18-19), those added to the church were inducted into the kingdom. Paul said the Colossians were saved, thus added to the church (Eph. 1:22-23, 5:30; Col. 1:1-5), yet they were inducted into the kingdom. (Col. 1:13-14). The apostle John was in the church (1 Cor. 12:28), and said he was in the kingdom. (Rev. 1:9). Hence, on Pentecost and thereafter people were inducted into the church or kingdom.

The day of Pentecost (A.D. 33) is the birthday of the New Testament church. Therefore, any church whose birthday is either before or after that date cannot be the church Jesus built.

The church of Christ today possesses this mark of divinity.

PLACE OF BIRTH

Where was the church first established? God said, "I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: My house shall be built in it" (Zech. 1:16). God's house is the church (1 Tim. 3:15). Hence, the church was to begin in Jerusalem (Zion). (Isa. 2:1-4; Micah 4:1-4).

1. The foundation of the church was laid in Zion (Jerusalem) (Isa. 28:16). The church was built upon its foundation in Jerusalem.

2. The church, or kingdom, and the promised "power from on high" were to come together. (Mk. 9:1). The "power" came to the apostles in Jerusalem. (Lk. 24:46-49; Acts 2:1-4). Therefore, the church (kingdom) came "with" the power, and thus was born in Jerusalem. Any church that began in Rome, England, America or any place other than Jerusalem, is not the church of Christ.

The church of Christ today originated in Jerusalem.

DESIGNATIONS

Terms referring to the church are used in both the general and local sense. All Christians constitute the church in the general sense; different congregations of Christians compose the churches in the local sense.

1. In the general sense the church has a number of designations. Jesus called it "my church," "the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 16:18-19), and

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Some Reason Why Christ's Church Could Not Have Existed Before Christ's Death, Burial, Resurrection, and Ascension into Heaven.

By L. E. Wishum

It Would Have Been Without Head

Since the church is the body of Christ (Col. 1:18), it could not exist, as a body, without a head. Jesus became head of his church when he sat down at the right hand of the Father in Heaven. (Ep. 1:20-23). When John's head was separated from his body, he died. (Mt. 14:10-12). I give the above case to simply remind you that a body cannot live without a head.

It Would Have Been Without Blood

Jesus's blood was poured out in his death on the cross. (Jno. 19:34). By his blood we are saved from our sins. (Rev. 1:5,6). Apart from blood there is no remission. (Heb. 9:22). He also purchased the church with his blood. (Acts 20:28). Therefore: if the church, or body, existed before the death of Christ, it existed without blood. It would have had all manner of sin in it, for there was not any blood to cleanse it. (Heb. 10:4; Eph. 5:26, 26).

It Would Have Been Without Law To Govern It

Christ's law did not come into effect until after his death. (Heb. 9:16,17). An institution like the church cannot exist without some law to govern it. The Old Testament did not govern it, and even if it had, it was abolished at the cross. (Eph. 2:15). When you blot out the laws that govern an institution you kill the institution. The Old Testament law was blotted out and nailed to the cross. (Col. 2:14). Therefore, if a church had been in existence during the time of the Old Testament, it would have ceased to exist when the law ceased to be in force.

It Would Have Been Without Husband

The church of Christ is referred to as His Bride. (Jno. 3:28-30). The same relationship that exists between husband and wife is said to exist between Christ and his church. (Eph. 5:22-23). Neither John, nor any other man, claimed to be head, or husband, of any church before the death of Christ. Christ became husband when he became head. (Eph. 1:20-23); 5:22-33).

It Would Have Been Without Spirit

CONCLUSION: If Christ's church existed before his death, burial, resurrection, and ascension into heaven—it was a HEADLESS, BLOODLESS, SPIRITLESS, LAWLESS, HUSBANDLESS, DEAD WIDOW. I ask you, "Could a body exist in the above described condition???"

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20:28-31; 2 Thes. 2:3-12; 1 Tim. 4:1-4; 2 Tim. 3:1-5, 4:1-4; 2 Pet. 2:1-3; 1 Jno. 2:18-19; 2 Jno. 9; Jude 4). Church history confirms the fulfillment of these prophecies; the church did largely fall away from the apostolic doctrine and practice.

It is not necessary to "rattle" an unbroken chain of succession from apostolic days in order to have a New Testament church. For example, if there were watermelons in California but none in Florida, and one desired to grow watermelons in Florida, is it necessary to grow a watermelon vine all the way from California to Florida? No! All one needs to do is to take the watermelon seed from California and plant it in Florida, and give it proper conditions of growth. The life is in the seed.

Even so, we have the word of God, which is the seed of the kingdom (Matt. 13:19; Lk. 8:10-12). It is living and active and able to save (Rom. 1:16; Heb. 4:12; Jas. 1:18-21; 1 Pet. 1:22-25). All that is needed to have a New Testament congregation *now* is to sow the gospel seed, which when received into good and honest hearts, believed and obeyed, will produce *Christians only and New Testament congregations*. Those who carried the gospel seed from the Jerusalem church (the first congregation) to other places, and planted congregations (Acts 8:1-5, 18:1-6; 1 Cor. 1:1-6), were only reproducing the church as it was when first built by Christ.

Each congregation produced now by hearing and doing the sayings of Christ (Matt. 7:13-26) is the true church, even though another like it could not be found in history for hundreds of years. Wheat, thousands of years old, has been taken out of the tombs of some of the Pharaohs. These seeds had not changed; they produced wheat when planted and cultivated. Likewise, God's word will produce Christians and congregations as in the first century when planted in the hearts of sinners and cultivated.

Dear reader, you are urged to make an honest investigation. Compare the churches of today with these divine marks of the New Testament church. Remember, any church that is minus these marks of identity is not of scriptural origin. If you find a church with these divine characteristics, you have found the true church. One who makes an honest investigation will discover that the church of Christ today possesses these marks of divinity. Therefore, it is the New Testament church.

Are you a member of the Lord's church? If not, now that you know the truth, you are urged to obey it so as to be saved and added by the Lord to His church, the New Testament church, the church of Christ. (Mk. 16:15-16; Acts 2:36-47, 8:36-39, 18:8; Rom. 6:16-18). Then work and worship only with a congregation like those in the Bible.

Any member of the church of Christ will gladly assist you in obeying the truth. Why not obey the gospel and be saved today? Tomorrow may be too late (Heb. 3:7-8; Rom. 2:8-9; 2 Tim. 1:7-9). "Procrastination is the thief of time" . . . and of souls!!!

SERMON OUTLINE

REMEMBER

By SAM BINKLEY

INTRODUCTON:

The book of Ecclesiastes shows it is vain to seek happiness through the things of the world. Gradual decay of faculties and hardness of heart through deceitfulness of sin show we should remember our Creator in youth.

DISCUSSION:

I. Remember: Whom? "Thy Creator."

- A. Man has a creator.
1. Man is a dependent creature. Gen. 3:19.
 2. God is the Creator.
 - (a) Gen. 1:1; Ex. 20:11; Psa. 124:8; Isa. 40:28.
 - (b) God created man. Gen. 1:26, 2:7; Deut. 4:32; Psa. 100:3; Acts 17:25, 26, 28.
 - (c) God created man through Christ. Jno. 1:1; Col. 1:16.
- B. It is possible for man to forget God.
1. Man knew God before sin. Gen. 3:24.
 2. Moses feared for Israel. Deut. 6:12.
 3. Result of forgetting God. Psa. 9:17.
 4. Guard against this. Isa. 59:2; Heb. 3:12.
- C. Man needs to remember God.
1. We remember kindness from friend.
 2. Should consider benefits from Creator.

II. Remember: How?

- A. By thinking of His person.
1. The wicked do not. Psa. 10:4.
 2. The good do. Psa. 63:6.
- B. By reflecting on His character.
1. Attributes of holiness, loving-kindness, faithfulness, truth, wisdom, and justice.
- C. By acknowledging His goodness.
1. Giver of every good gift. Jas. 1:17.
 2. Be thankful for gift of His Son.
- D. By meditating on His word.
1. 2 Pet. 1:3; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17.
 2. Meditate day and night. Psa. 1:2.
 3. Israel counted His law a strange thing. Hos. 8:12.
- E. By keeping His commandments.
1. Christ overcame temptation with Scripture. Mt. 4:1-11.
 2. Jn. 14:15, 15:14; Mt. 7:21; Heb. 5:8-9.

III. Remember: When?

- A. In the days of thy youth. TEXT.
1. Deut. 31:13. Children learn to fear.
 2. Psa. 34:11. "Come ye children . . ."
 3. Matt. 6:33.
- B. But not then only.

IV. Remember: Why?

- A. Why remember our Creator?
1. He is worthy of being remembered.
 2. The fact that He is Creator entitles Him to be remembered.
 3. Must, to be happy here and saved hereafter.
 4. Man is prone to forget God.
- B. Why remember Him in youth?
1. Should spend life in service to God.
 2. Youth time to form habits. Prov. 22:6.
 3. Easier to remember Him then.
 4. If God is not remembered in youth he is apt to be forgotten in old age.

"my kingdom" (Jno. 18:36). It is also called "the kingdom of God's dear Son" (Col. 1:13), "the body of Christ" (I Cor. 12:27), "His body" (Eph. 1:22), "the house of God" (I Tim. 3:5-15), "the church of God" (I Cor. 10:32, 11:22, 15:9; Gal. 1:13) and the "church" (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18).

2. When the church is mentioned in the local and plural sense it refers to the different groups of Christians meeting for worship at different places. In the local sense we read of "the church of God which is at Corinth" (I Cor. 1:2). (See also Rom. 16:5-1; I Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Philemon 2; I Pet. 5:13). Congregations are mentioned in the plural sense as "Churches of God" (I Cor. 11:16, I Thess. 2:15; 2 Thess. 1:4), "Churches of Christ" (Rom. 16:16), "the churches, of Galatia" (Gal. 1:2) and "the churches" (Acts 9:31, 16:5). There are twenty-seven different churches or congregations mentioned in the New Testament. However, these were not different denominations; they all were identical in faith, name, doctrine and worship.

Any church today that wears a name not authorized by the Bible is not identical with the church revealed in God's word, hence, cannot be of divine origin.

Churches of Christ today are scriptural in name.

NAME OF MEMBERS

Members of the early church were children of God (Rom. 8:14-15). Regarding their purity of life, they were "saints" (I Cor. 1:1-3). As learners of Christ they were "disciples" (Acts 9:1, 20-7). In relationship to one another, they were "brethren" (Gal. 6:1).

However, God promised His children a name unlike any name ever before worn. (Read Isa. 56:5, 62:2, 65:15). (1) It was to be a "new" name (never worn before); (2) a new "name" (singular in number); (3) "an everlasting name"; (4) to be given in God's house; (5) to be given after Gentiles were converted; (6) God was to be its author.

God sometimes gave names through agents (Gen. 16:11-19; Matt. 1:21; Lk. 1:13). Hence, Saul of Tarsus (Paul) was chosen to bear this "new name" (Acts 9:1-15). Afterward Barnabas went to Tarsus to seek Saul. "And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch" (Acts. 11:22-26).

This was in fulfillment of God's promise (Isa. 56:5, 62:2, 65:15). (1) A "new" name was given. (2) It was a "name" (singular in number) (1 Pet. 4:11-16-R.V.). (3) The name "Christian" is to last till the end of time. (4) It was given in God's house, the church (I Tim. 3:15; Acts 11:26). (5) God's prophetic reference to "all the nations that are called by my name" (Amos 9:12-R.V.), began to be fulfilled at Antioch (Acts. 11:26, 15:14-17). The church

there was the first to be composed of both Jews and Gentiles. (6) God is the author of that "new name." Therefore, it was not given in derision by enemies of Christianity as some people teach. The Greek word "*Crematizo*," rendered "called" in Acts 11:26, means "to declare by an oracle" and implies a divine source.

The name "*Christian*" is mentioned three times in the New Testament (Acts 11:26, 26:28; I Pet. 4:16). Writers allude to it in Eph. 3:14, Jas. 2:7 and I Pet. 4:14. Every time this name is pronounced, the name of Christ, which it includes, is spoken. Hence, it is a "worthy name" (Jas. 2:7); it is the *only* name in (through) which one can glorify God (I Pet. 4:16-R.V.); it is the *only* name to be worn by Christ's bride or church. To wear human religious names is to promote division, and to be carnal and sinful (I Cor. 1:10-13, 3:3-6).

The church of Christ on earth today rejects human names in religion. Being married to Christ, it wears His name. (Rom. 7:1-6).

CREED AND DOCTRINE

The only creed (Latin *credo*, I believe) of the church in the first century was belief in Christ as the Son of God (Matt. 16:16; Acts 8:37; I Jno. 5:1); Christ was the object of its faith. Its sole rule of faith and practice was the doctrine of Christ (not a human creed or discipline). The first human creed was written almost three hundred years after Jesus built His church and gave it the New Testament. When men became displeased with the doctrine of Christ, they met and formed the "Nicene Creed," about 325 A.D.

How did the early church obtain the doctrine of Christ? (1) God gave it to Christ (Jno. 7:16, 8:28). (2) Jesus transmitted it to His apostles (Jno. 17:8-14; Gal. 1:10-13). (3) The apostles taught it to the church (Matt. 28:18-20; Jno. 17:20-22; Acts 2:42; I Cor. 2:12-13, 11:22-23, 14:1-4; 2 Pet. 1:3). (4) The Holy Spirit inspired men to speak and write the New Testament (Jno. 14:26, 16:13; Rev. 2 and 3). Their writings are "the commandments of the Lord" (I Cor. 14:37). (5) The doctrine of Christ was divinely recorded for our guidance in all matters religious. (Jno. 20:30-31; 2 Pet. 3:1-4). It is the complete authority in the Christian religion. (2 Tim. 3:16-18).

What does the doctrine of Christ teach sinners to do to be saved? They are instructed to (1) believe in Christ (Jno. 8:24; Acts 16:30; Rom. 10:9), (2) repent of all sins (Acts 3:19, 17:30), (3) confess faith in Christ (Matt. 10:32; Rom. 10:9-10), and (4) be baptized in water "unto the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38-R.V.). Those who thus obey are saved. "Mourner's bench salvation," signing decision cards, fondling a "faith-healing" cloth, and relating experiences as evidence of pardon, are not authorized by the doctrine of Christ.

What is the doctrine of Christ regarding water baptism?

1. As to its necessity, Christ and His apostles taught that water baptism is essential to salvation. Salvation is *in* Christ (Eph. 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:10). But one must be baptized "into Jesus Christ" (Rom. 6:3-6; Gal. 3:27) in order to obtain that salvation which is in Christ. In every verse in the New Testament where baptism and salvation, or its equivalent, are mentioned together, baptism is always placed before salvation. (See Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38, 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:21).

2. The gospel of Christ says that only believers can be scripturally baptized. (Mk. 16:16; Acts 8:12-39, 18:8; Rom. 10:9). Therefore, "infant baptism" is not taught in the doctrine of Christ.

3. Relative to the "mode" of baptism, the New Testament describes it as immersion, a planting, a burial (Acts 8:12-39; Rom. 6:3-6; Col. 2:12). "Baptize" (Greek "*baptizo*" does not mean "sprinkle" or "pour." (See any standard Greek Lexicon). Christ, the apostles and the church in the first century never taught nor practiced sprinkling and pouring for baptism. Therefore, such practices are not authorized by Christ.

What is the doctrine of Christ concerning the importance of the church? It teaches that all the saved are in the Lord's church. (1) One must be in the church to rest upon Jesus, its foundation (1 Cor. 3:11). (2) All the saved are added by the Lord to His church (Acts 2:36-47). Hence, there is no saved person outside of the church. (3) One must be in the church (body) to be numbered with the saved (1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 1:22-23, 5:23). Therefore, to assert that one can be a Christian and go to heaven without being a member of the Lord's church is to say that Jesus shed His precious blood to purchase a worthless institution!

What does the doctrine of Christ instruct individual members of the church to do? They are taught to (1) worship regularly (Acts 2:42, 20:7; Heb. 10:23-27), (2) live godly lives (Tit. 2:11-14; 2 Pet. 1:4-12), (3) take heed lest they fall from grace and be lost (Jno. 15:1-7; 1 Cor. 10:12; Gal. 1:12, 5:1-6; Heb. 3:11, 4:1-11), (4) repent of all sins, confess them and pray for forgiveness (Acts 8:14-25; 1 Jno. 1:8-10), and (5) beware of false teachers (Acts 20:20-31; Gal. 1:1-10; Eph. 4:14; Col. 2:20-22; 1 Tim. 4:1-6; 1 Jno. 4:1-3; 2 Jno. 9).

The doctrine of Christ did not originate with any man or group. It came from God and is His only revelation to man. And no pope, prelate, priest, or anyone else, has the divine right to change God's will from that which is written (1 Cor. 4:6-10-R.V.). To do so is to be cursed of the Lord (Gal. 1:6-10; 2 Jno. 9).

Any church whose creed and doctrine differs from that of the New Testament cannot be of divine origin.

The church of Christ today has Christ as its only creed. And it proposes to teach the doctrine of Christ; to speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent.

WORSHIP

Although one may worship God on any day

of the week, the Lord has designated a *certain day* upon which Christians are to perform certain acts of worship. That day is *not* the Sabbath, which was given only to the Jews (Deut. 5:15). God said the Sabbath would cease (Hosea 2:11), and tells us when it was to cease (Amos 8:5-9). This Scripture was fulfilled when Christ was crucified (Lk. 23:44). Therefore, the law and Sabbath ended at the cross (Eph. 2:12-27; Col. 2:12-16).

The first day of the week is the day when Christians are to assemble for worship. It is "the Lord's day" (Rev. 1:10). Jesus arose on that day (Jno. 20:1-9). The Holy Spirit came and the church was established on that day (Acts 2:1-47). The church of Christ in the first century came together for worship on that day (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-3; 1 Cor. 11). There is no divine record where Christians ever came together to worship on the Sabbath day.

New Testament church worship consisted of the following: (1) *Eating the Lord's Supper* (Matt. 26:25-30; Lk. 22:16-26; Acts 2:42, 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:23-26). (2) *Singing and making melody in the heart* (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Rom. 15:9; 1 Cor. 14:15; Heb. 2:12). Singing is the only kind of music authorized in Christian worship. No church in the first century used mechanical instruments in its worship. (3) *Prayers* (Acts 2:42; 1 Tim. 2:1-8). (4) *Giving of the income as prospered and purposed* (1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 9:7). The early church gave no suppers, bazaars, nor used publicity stunts to raise money for the church. Such things set aside God's plan for financing His kingdom. (5) *Engaging in a study of God's word* (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 2:42, 20:7).

The members did not come together to entertain, or for display, but to honor God and remember Jesus. They were to worship God in the right attitude and according to the Lord's will (Jno. 4:23-24).

Any changes in this divine worship—the day, purpose or items—results in the condemnation of those making the change (2 Jon. 9). A church whose worship is not identical with the worship thus set forth is not the New Testament church.

In its worship the church of Christ today is like the church revealed in the Bible.

ORGANIZATION

1. New Testament congregations were composed of members (Rom. 12:4-5, 16:1-3) 1 Cor. 12:27). Local church membership was practiced in the first century.

2. From the local membership qualified men were selected and appointed to serve as elders (Acts 14:23, 20:17; Tit. 1:5). These men were also called "bishops" (Tit. 1:5-7), "pastors" (Eph. 4:11) and "overseers" (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:13). These terms refer to the same individuals and office. There were two or more elders, or bishops, in each congregation (Acts 20:17, 14:23). Therefore, placing one "bishop" over one congregation or more was never authorized of God. The responsibility and work

of elders include the following: (a) Feeding (teaching) the church (Acts 20:28), (b) guarding the flock from false teachers (Acts 20:28-31; Heb. 13:17), (c) ruling the congregation as examples (not as lords) (Rom. 12:8; 1 Tim. 5:3), and (d) tending the flock, "taking the oversight thereof" (1 Pet. 5:2). Their qualifications are listed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

3. Deacons were appointed to assist the elders as servants of the congregation. They, like other members, worked under the oversight of the elders. Their qualifications are listed in 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

The church in the first century contained men whose work was temporary in nature. (1) There were living apostles (1 Cor. 12:28), whose work was to reveal and confirm the Will and Testament of Christ (Jno. 16:33; Mk. 16:17-20; Heb. 2:1-5). This was accomplished in the first century, hence, there is no need for living apostles today, and we have none (1 Cor. 4:9). (2) Inspired prophets in the church were only temporary (1 Cor. 13:8-12; 2 Pet. 1:19). These ceased when the New Testament was written. (3) The early church also contained miraculously endowed men to temporarily guide, protect and instruct the congregations (1 Cor. 12:1-28; Eph. 4:8-12). These gifts ceased when the "unity of the faith" was reached—when all parts of the New Testament were revealed and confirmed (1 Cor. 13:8-13). This was accomplished by the close of the first century. Therefore, there are no miraculously endowed men now. The only permanent workers in the church were the members, evangelists, elders and deacons. There were no popes, cardinals, patriarchs, archbishops, deans, priests, sub-deacons, etc., appointed in the church Jesus built. These exist now without divine authority.

The organization of the church of Christ today is patterned after the New Testament church.

GOVERNMENT

The church of the Bible was not governed by popes, prelates, or priests. Neither did it make laws for its own government, nor select representatives by popular vote. Nor was it a limited monarchy in which the king had no power to make laws, and whose powers and privileges were curtailed. The New Testament church was an *absolute monarchy*, a kingdom in which *all* authority was vested in Christ the king. (Matt. 28:18-20; Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18). Jesus is *supreme Head* (singular) of His church (Col. 1:18). He is not "one" head of His church and the pope of Rome another. He is the *only* head of His church that is mentioned in the Bible. Hence, God and Christ never gave Peter or any man authority to be the "Vicar of Christ" or "earthly head" of the New Testament church. All who claim to be such are imposters.

Churches in the first century were not governed by associations, synods, presiding elders, district superintendents, majority vote, councils, or evangelistic courts; there was no organization tying one church to another. Nor did one congregation have authority over another. Each

was independent of the others with the right of local government. God's wisdom is seen in this, for if one church became corrupt in doctrine and practice and perished or digressed, others would not be affected or dragged down with it.

Each congregation was governed by elders who were to rule under Christ by leading the church to obey Him. (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 3:4-5; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). But if the elders demanded that the church violate the doctrine of Christ, the congregation was to reject them and obey God. (Acts 4:20, 5:27-30). The church is to obey Christ, the King and Ruler, in all things. (Matt. 17:5-7; Acts 3:22-24; 2 Cor. 10:4-5; Heb. 5:8-9).

Any church with a form of government different from the church Jesus built is not of divine origin.

The church of Christ is governed exactly as the first century church.

WORK

The New Testament church was a body of workers called out from the world. (Col. 3:15; 1 Pet. 2:9). Ultimate salvation of its members depended upon their work. (1 Cor. 15:28; Eph. 2:10; Phil. 2:1-12; Heb. 4:11; Rev. 2 and 3).

The work of the church included the following: (1) *Preaching the gospel (not politics, patriotism, etc.)* (Matt. 28:19; Mk. 16:15; Acts 8:1-38; Rom. 1:14-16; Eph. 3:5-12). (2) *Supporting the truth with godly living and contributions* (1 Tim. 3:14-15; Phil. 1:27-R.V.; 1 Cor. 16:1; Rom. 10:10-16). (3) *Defending the truth against error* (Phil. 1:17; Jude 3). The Bible has no voice of its own with which to defend itself when perverted; Christians must defend it. (4) *Edifying itself* (Matt. 28:19; Eph. 4:14-16). (5) *Comforting, admonishing and encouraging one another* (1 Thess. 4:13-17, 5:11-14; Acts 16:40). (6) *Restoring the erring* (Gal. 6:1; Jas. 5:19-20). (7) *Helping those in need* (Acts 2:45; 4:32-36; Jas. 1:27; Gal. 6:10).

The church Jesus built was sufficient in itself to do all of its work. Therefore, it needed no missionary societies, lodges or fraternal organizations to do its work. God was to be glorified through His *church* (Eph. 3:21), not some human society. The work of the early church was done through the church itself. As individual Christians, the members honored Christ *through that divine institution!* Hence, a religious body that does its work through some human organization today is not the church built by Christ.

The church of Christ does it work as did the early church; it has this divine mark.

CONCLUSION

We are nearly two thousand years removed from the first congregation ever established. But we can be just as sure that we have the same church today as if we were only a few years separated from it. However, it would be a waste of time to try to trace a succession of such congregations all the way back to the apostles. Jesus and His apostles prophesied that the time would come when the church would turn away from the doctrine of Christ. (Matt. 7:15-20; Acts