

## The New Testament Church

### Part 19: Does the Church of Christ Exist Today?

Colossians 1:15-23

#### I. INTRODUCTION: I

1. Our appeal today is to Scripture (**2 Tim. 3:16-17**: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: 17 That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”).
  - A. If what we have to say in this lesson is according to Scripture it is according to God.
  - B. If not, then it is not of God and will leave you imperfect and unfurnished “unto all good works.”
  - C. I implore you to carefully consider what I say, take notes, take it home and think about; if you have questions please ask them.
  - D. If you believe something I say is not in agreement with God’s word please bring that to my attention (**Isa. 1:18**: “Come now, and let us reason together.”).
  - E. If what I say is true to God’s word let us both cling to it and follow it to the best of our ability.
2. **2** Lord willing, today will be our final lesson in the series: The New Testament Church.
3. During the course of this study we’ve studied the various aspects of the Christ’s church as it is presented in the Bible; not the doctrines and teachings of men.
4. Even though we’ve covered a mountain of material; understanding the church as it is presented in the Bible is not a difficult subject (**Eph. 3:1-7**). The difficulty arises from all of the confusing and false teachings of men concerning the church.
5. I think it is very evident that the study of the New Testament church is important because:
  - A. The “church” is the “body of Christ”; it is where God reconciles man to Himself (**Col. 1:21-22**: “And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled 22 in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight...”).
  - B. The church of Christ in the NT consisted of the “saved”:
    - (1) The “Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47).
    - (2) Also, “...Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body” (Eph. 5:23).
    - (3) If we would be saved, if we would find a home in heaven in eternity we must be in the church of Christ! That makes it essential that we find the church of Christ!
  - C. The church of Christ in the NT is the “body” (Col. 1:18) and there is only “one body” (Eph. 4:4); thus there is only one church of Christ!
  - D. We found in the course of our study that the New Testament presents a very definite pattern for the church.
  - E. But here’s the problem: In the course of our study we found that there is not just “one body” or “church” in the world; there are multiplied thousands!
    - (1) This makes our search for the one and only NT church, the church of Christ, more difficult.
    - (2) This unfortunate situation makes it critical that we devise a strategy to determine if the ancient and original church of Christ still exists some 2,000 years after Christ established it.
5. **3** So what would be a good strategy to determine if Christ’s church exists today?

- A. I think it is parallel to this situation: Suppose you were walking down the street and an alien from outer space landed and asked you, “Can you help me find the United States of America?”
- B. What instructions would you give him? You probably would tell him things like:
  - (1) Location/geography: the U.S. consists of 48 contiguous states located in the western hemisphere, North American continent (except Alaska, Hawaii).
  - (2) Organization: Federal government w/3 branches (Executive, Legislative, Judicial); 50 separate states with their own governments.
  - (3) Founding:
    - (a) Place: Philadelphia
    - (b) Documents: Declaration of Independence, U.S. Constitution
    - (c) Founding fathers: Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Ben Franklin, George Washington, etc.
    - (d) Date: dates of founding; 1776 (Declaration of Independence); 1787 (U.S. Constitution).
- C. In other words, I would give him information that would help him distinguish the United States of America from every other country on earth.
- 6. So that’s the strategy I will use to determine if the church of Christ exists today: **\*\*\* Is there any church on earth today that fits the description of Christ’s church given in the New Testament?**
  - A. If we can find a church that meets the specific criteria that define the church of Christ in the New Testament then, yes, the church of Christ exists today.
  - B. If we cannot find a church that meets these specific criteria, then, no, the church of Christ of the NT does not exist today.
  - C. If the church of Christ does exist; it is critical we become a part of it (Acts 2:47; Eph. 5:23).
  - D. If the church of Christ does not exist; it is critical that we take the pattern God gave for the church in the New Testament and use that divine template to obey and serve God.

## II. DISCUSSION:

***If I were looking for the church of Christ found in the New Testament, I would reject any church that was not founded like Christ’s original church...***

I. **5 Founding**: refer to Lessons #5 and #6.

### A. **When**:

- (1) Not in existence during Christ’s earthly ministry: Matt. 16:18
- (2) Founding the subject of prophecy: **Isa. 2:2-3**: “And it shall come to pass in the **last days**, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. 3 And many people shall go and say, ‘Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.”
- (3) We find that church coming into existence in Acts 2 (Peter’s sermon establishes Christ’s credentials to establish/build His church, v. 36; His law goes forth from Zion and His word from Jerusalem; therefore→Acts 2:47; Col. 1:13; Dan. 2:26-45, esp. v. 44; days of Roman Empire).

- (4) Peter's quotation of Joel's prophecy confirms Acts 2 is the right time: **Acts 2:16-21**: 16 "But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 17 'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God..." (cf. Joel 2:28-29).
- (5) This is about 600 years before Roman Catholicism came into existence and about 1,500 years before the very first Protestant denomination came into existence.
- (6) The church of Christ in the NT originated in the mind of God (Eph. 3:10-11).
  - (a) That cannot be said concerning denominational churches.
  - (b) They originated in the minds of men, not God.
  - (c) There wasn't even one of the denominational churches in existence in the first century.
- (7) Any church not founded on the first Pentecost after the death, burial and resurrection of Christ is not the church of Christ; we must reject it from consideration!

#### B. **Where:**

- (1) Isaiah's prophecy tells us the church of Christ would be established in Jerusalem: **Isa. 2:3b**: "...for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."
- (2) Jesus told His apostles: **Lk. 24:49**: "Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high."
- (3) That is exactly where we find them in Acts 2 when the church of Christ came into existence: on the Day of Pentecost when the apostles received "the Promise of the Father" they were in "Jerusalem" (Acts 2:5).
- (4) Any church not founded on the first Pentecost after the death, burial and resurrection of Christ in Jerusalem cannot possibly be the church of Christ we find in the NT; we must reject it from consideration!

#### C. **Who:**

- (1) The church of Christ in the NT was built by Jesus Christ Himself: Matt. 16:18 What "rock"? v. 16: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."
- (2) Jesus is the builder, the foundation, and the savior of the church of Christ in the NT:
 

**1 Cor. 3:11**: "For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."; Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:23; Rom. 7:4
- (3) Any church built by anyone other than Jesus Christ is not the church of Christ we find in the NT; we must reject it from consideration!

#### D. **What:** By "what" I mean "what" did the inspired authors of the New Testament call Christ's church?

- (1) They called it, e.g.: **2 Cor. 1:1**: "...the church of God" or "The churches of Christ..." (Rom. 16:16)
  - (a) They did not use names of human founders (e.g., *Lutheran*, *Wesleyan*).
  - (b) They did not use names indicating peculiarities of organization like Episcopal, Presbyterian, or Congregational.
  - (c) They did not use names indicating peculiarities of doctrine like *Baptist*, *Methodist* or *7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventist*.
- (2) Nothing in a name?! Yes, there is much in a name! Explain

- (3) Why would anyone put any other name on Christ's church than the names given in the NT?!  
Matt. 16:18; Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:23; 1 Cor. 3:11
- (4) Any church wearing a name other than the ones used by the inspired writers of the NT is not the church of Christ we find in the NT; we must reject it from consideration!

### E. 6 Summary:

What	When	Where	Who
Roman Catholic	606 AD	Rome	Boniface III
Episcopal	1520 AD	England	Henry VIII
Presbyterian	1536 AD	Switzerland	John Calvin
Congregational	1550 AD	England	Robert Browne
Baptist	1607 AD	Holland	John Smythe
Methodist	1739 AD	England	John Wesley
Mormon	1830 AD	America	Joseph Smith
7 <sup>th</sup> Day Adventist	1830 AD	America	William Miller
Christian Scientist	1866 AD	America	Mary Baker Eddy
Jehovah's Witness	1872 AD	America	Charles T. Russell

***If I were looking for the church of Christ found in the New Testament, I would reject any church that did not worship like Christ's original church...***

2. **7 Worship:** In lesson #8 we found that the worship of Christ's church found in the NT was very simple: overall guiding principle is found in **Jn. 4:24**: "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him **must** worship in spirit and truth."

A. "Truth": pertains to one's method of worship.

- (1) **\*\*** Most churches think they can worship God in any way that they find is pleasing to them. That's not a biblical principle! The First Church of Cannabis
- (a) Consider Cain: Gen. 4:3-5; Cain offered "the fruit of the ground," while his brother Abel offered "the firstborn of his flock." God "did not respect Cain and his offering." Why?
- Heb. 11:4**: "By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks."; Rom. 10:17
- (b) Consider Nadab & Abihu: Lev. 10:1-2; Sons of Aaron, burned incense using fire "which He had not commanded them," result "So fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord." Is it important to worship according to the truth? Yes!
- (2) **\*\*** There is a specific pattern that the church of Christ as revealed in the NT followed insofar as the acceptable method of worship is concerned:
- (a) Lord's Supper: 1 Cor. 11:23-29; Matt. 26:26-29; Acts 20:7
- (b) Giving of our means: 1 Cor. 16:1-2: NASV: "on the first day of every week"; 2 Cor. 8 & 9
- (c) Preaching/teaching: **Acts 2:42**: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers."; **Acts 20:7**: "Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight."
- (d) Prayer: Acts 2:42

- (e) Singing: **Eph. 5:19**: “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,”; Col. 3:16
- (3) In most churches we don’t find this pattern of worship being followed. \*\*
  - (a) Instrumental music, hand clapping, dancing, speaking in “tongues,” etc.
  - (b) Worship in most churches is “entertainment,” the worshipers are no longer participants, they are an audience! Big difference!
- B. \*\* “Spirit”: pertains to one’s attitude in worship.
  - (1) “Worship” comes from the Greek word *proskuneo*:
    - (a) **Strong**: meaning “a kiss, like a dog licking his master’s hand; to fawn or crouch, i.e., prostrate oneself in homage (do reverence to, adore)”
    - (b) **Thayer**: “of homage shown to men of superior rank; of homage rendered to God and the ascended Christ...”
    - (c) **Vine**: “to make obeisance, do reverence to”
  - (2) When we worship we need to realize God is the object of our worship: who are we worshipping! **Rom. 1:20**: “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead...”
    - (a) Our worship should be characterized by an attitude of deep respect for who is being worshiped! **Heb. 12:28-29**: “...let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. 29 For our God is a consuming fire.” (El Shaddai; God Almighty)
    - (b) We’re not spectators, we’re not the audience, we certainly aren’t the object of worship.
    - (c) We are present to worship God sincerely from the heart, not to be entertained:
      - ☛ To “give as he purposes in his heart” (2 Cor. 9:7),
      - ☛ To sing “and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Eph. 5:19),
      - ☛ To give “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.” (1 Cor. 11:28)
  - (3) The worship of Christ’s church in the NT was characterized by a proper “decorum”: **1 Cor. 14:40**: “Let all things be done decently and in order.”
- C. \*\* Modern denominationalism tells us that when it comes to worshipping God anything is acceptable as long as it is done sincerely (Indianapolis: The First Church of Cannabis).
- D. However, Jesus said that worship that is not based on truth is “vain” (Matt. 15:9).
- E. So, to distinguish Christ’s true church from the churches of men we need look no further than how that church worships God.
  - (1) If it worships God “in spirit and truth” by following the pattern set by the church of Christ in the NT it is the church of Christ of the NT.
  - (2) The churches of men do not follow this pattern, they do not worship God “in spirit and truth,” therefore, their worship, like Cain’s or Nadab and Abihu’s is rejected by God!

***If I were looking for the church of Christ found in the New Testament, I would reject any church that was not organized like Christ’s original church...***

### 3. **8 Organization**: Lesson #10

## A. The organization of Christ's church in the NT is very simple:

- (1) Universal church: In its universal sense the church consists of Christ as its head (Eph. 1:20-23; Col. 1:18) and each faithful Christian is a member of His body (1 Cor. 12:12; Eph. 5:30).
- (a) What is a "headquarters"? It's where the "head" of something is "quartered" (i.e., located).
  - (b) So you can tell a great deal about a church by where its "headquarters" is located; a church's "headquarters" reveals who is its "head."
  - (c) Since Christ is the "head over all things to the church" (Eph. 1:22) and is now sitting "at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1:3); which is in heaven (Eph. 1:20) the "headquarters" of the church of Christ's church in the NT is not on earth it's in heaven!
  - (d) \*\* But the churches of men invariably have an earthly "headquarters"; and that BTW means they have an earthly "head."
    - ☛ Roman Catholic Church; Rome, Italy
    - ☛ Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod; St. Louis, MO
    - ☛ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; Chicago, IL
    - ☛ Church of God; Cleveland, TN
    - ☛ Church of God; Anderson, IN
    - ☛ United Methodist Church; five "jurisdictions" each with a regional office (e.g., Nashville, TN; NYC; Washington D.C.; Glenview, IL)
    - ☛ Christian Church (*Disciples of Christ*), Indianapolis, IN
  - (e) Any church without Christ as its head and its headquarters located in heaven is not the church of Christ we find in the NT; we must reject it from consideration!
- (2) **9 Local church**: **Phil. 1:1**: "To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons..."
- (a) **Saints**: **Eph. 4:16**: "from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love."
  - (b) **Elders**: again, see Lesson #10
    - (i) Also known as "bishops" or "pastors" (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Pet. 5:1-4).
    - (ii) Always a plurality (e.g., **Acts 20:17**: "From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church."; **1 Pet. 5:1**: "The elders who are among you I exhort...")
    - (iii) Every local church had elders (as long as they had qualified men who desired to serve): **Acts 14:23**: "So when they had appointed elders in every church...").
    - (iv) Limited oversight: **1 Pet. 5:2**: "Shepherd the flock of God which is among you..."; **Acts 20:28**: "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.")
    - (v) Duties are inherent in what they are called: "bishops" (i.e., "the Holy Spirit has made you overseers"), "pastors" (i.e., "Shepherd the flock of God which is among you..."; **Heb. 13:17**: "...they watch out for your souls...").

(vi) Qualifications: **1 Tim. 3:1-7:** *“If a man desires the position of a bishop...”*; **Titus 1:5-9:** *“if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife...”* No women elders!

(c) **Deacons:**

- (i) Deacons are servants of the local church and are under the oversight of the elders.
- (ii) The duties of deacons are primarily in the “physical” realm so elders can attend to their spiritual duties
- (iii) Qualifications: 1 Tim. 3:8-13: *“Let deacons be the husband of one wife...”*

(d) **Evangelists:** 2 Tim. 4:5 (aka gospel preachers, not necessarily a “pastor”).

**2 Tim. 4:2-4:** *“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.”*

B. Be careful!

- (1) A church can be the church of Christ we read about in the NT even if it does not have elders and deacons (Acts 2: Jerusalem; Acts 16: Philippi).
- (2) But it is God’s plan that when men are qualified and willing to serve the church should have scripturally appointed elders and deacons (see Phil. 1:1; Acts 14:23).

C. When we look out on the religious landscape today we see churches with a multiplicity of “offices” not found in the NT.

- (1) Most churches don’t follow the NT pattern of saints, elders, deacons.
- (2) Most operate under the “pastor” system (confuse evangelist w/pastor).
- (3) Presidents, Popes, etc.

D. Any church that is not organized like the church of Christ in the NT is not the true church of Christ; we must reject it from consideration!

***If I were looking for the church of Christ we find in the New Testament, I would reject any church that did not use the same constitution as Christ’s original church...***

4. **10 Constitution:**

A. Remember our visitor from outer space trying to identify the United States of America?

- (1) One vital piece of information that would be useful in this endeavor is the U.S. constitution.
- (2) The U.S. constitution consists of a preamble, seven articles, and 27 amendments.
- (3) The first ten amendments are called the “Bill of Rights.”

B. Dictionary.com: “a system of fundamental principles to which a nation, state, corporation, or the like, is governed.”

C. The church of Christ in the Bible was also ruled by a “constitution,” so to speak:

- (1) The church of Christ in the NT was ruled by “*the doctrine of Christ*” (2 Jn. 9).
- (2) The “*doctrine of Christ*” is the same as the “*apostles’ doctrine*” (Acts 2:42) because these men were hand-picked by Jesus Himself and empowered by the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:26; 15:26; 16:13).
- (3) Therefore, whatever they taught were “*the commandments of the Lord*” (1 Cor. 14:37).



- (4) What they taught is also called the “gospel” (Rom. 2:16) which Paul said God would use to “judge the secrets of men...”; and there is only one true gospel (Gal. 1:6-9)
- (5) In Jude 3 the gospel is referred to “the faith”; and the inspired apostle Paul said there is but “one faith” (Eph. 4:5).

D. \*\* Christ’s church in the NT was not ruled by the creeds, catechism and other documents we see in denominational churches:

- ☛ *Roman Catholic Church: Catechism of the Catholic Church*
- ☛ *Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod: Book of Concord* (official confession of faith or creed/ but also use a book called *Franz August Pieper’s Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod*).
- ☛ *Evangelical Lutheran Church in America: Book of Concord* (official confession of faith or creed).
- ☛ *Church of God; Cleveland, TN* (Wikipedia: “The *Declaration of Faith* is the Church of God’s doctrinal standard.”)
- ☛ *United Methodist Church: “the Articles of Religion of The Methodist Church and the Confessions of Faith of The Evangelical United Brethren Church form a foundation of doctrine for United Methodists.”* They, along with Wesley’s *Sermons on Several Occasions* and *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, are “standards” of doctrine for United Methodists.
- ☛ *Baptist Church* (over 200 different ones listed in Wikipedia): Uses the “Baptist Manual”; but there are many of them! *Standard Manual for Baptist Churches*, by Edward Hiscox; *The New Hiscox Guide for Baptist Churches*, by Edward Hiscox & Everett C. Goodwin; *Church Manual Designed for use of Baptist Churches*, J. M. Pendleton; *The Baptist Church Manual*, by J. Newton Brown
- ☛ *Christian Church (Disciples of Christ): Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)*

E. \*\* The constitution of the church of Christ in the NT did not have to be updated (Jn. 16:13; Jude 3).

- (1) That can’t be said of the creeds, confessions, and catechisms of denominations.
- (2) The guiding documents of denominational churches do not say today what they said just a few years ago.
- (3) They have general assemblies, conventions, conferences with their representatives and they come together periodically and vote on their doctrine; therefore, they are constantly changing in what they teach and practice.
- (4) Not so with the church of Christ in the NT (**Psa. 119:89**: “For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven.”).
- (5) Do you want to know what we teach and practice? Just look in the Bible. 2 Pet. 1:3

F. Any church that does not use the NT as its sole constitution is not the church of Christ we find in the NT; we must reject it from consideration!

***If I were looking for the church of Christ found in the New Testament, I would reject any church that did not do the same purpose as Christ’s original church...***

5. **II Purpose:** Lesson #7

A. Universal church: being “in Christ” is the same as being “in the church” (Eph. 1:22-23; 1:3).

- ☛ **Salvation:** 2 Tim. 2:10; 1 Pet. 2:10



- ☛ **Reconciliation to God:** Col. 1:21-22; 2 Cor. 5:19
- ☛ **Redemption:** Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; Rom. 3:24; 1 Cor. 1:30; Matt. 20:28
- ☛ **Spiritual life:** Eph. 2:1, 5; Rom. 6:3-4
- ☛ **Sanctification:** Eph. 4:1; Phil. 1:1
- ☛ **Holiness:** Col. 1:21-22; Eph. 1:4
- ☛ **Adoption into God's family:** Eph. 1:5-6
- ☛ **Eternal inheritance:** Eph. 1:11; Rom. 8:17; 1 Pet. 1:4-5
- ☛ **Citizens of heaven:** Phil. 3:20; Heb. 12:22-23; Eph. 2:6-7; Rev. 21:27
- ☛ **All spiritual blessings:** Eph. 1:3

- (1) In its universal sense the church of Christ has no other purpose!
- (2) \*\* It has no earthly organization to do anything because all of the purposes of the universal church are spiritual in nature; they are accomplished "in Christ" as He sits at God's right hand in heaven!

**Jn. 18:36:** "My kingdom is not of this world."

**Rom. 14:17:** "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

B. **12 Local church:** 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1

- (1) Unlike the church in its universal sense, the church in the local sense has an organization (Phil. 1:1: saints, elders, deacons) and it has work God expects it to accomplish.
- (2) Purposes (i.e., work) of the church:
  - ☛ **Evangelism:** 1 Tim. 3:15: "...the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."; 1 Thess. 1:6-8: "And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. 8 **For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place.** Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything."; Acts 13, 14, 15; Mk. 16:15-16; Matt. 28:19-20; Phil. 4:15-16
  - ☛ **Edification:** Eph. 4:15-16: "but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ — 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body **for the edifying of itself in love.**"
  - ☛ **Benevolence:** Acts 4:34-35: "Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, 35 and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need."; always limited to "needy saints": Acts 11:27-30; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; **Rom. 15:25-26:** "But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. 26 For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem."
- (3) Denominational churches have abandoned the noble work of the first century church for what most call the "social gospel."
  - (a) Everything from job fairs to ceramics classes to jazzercise to boy scouts and girl scouts.
  - (b) Everything from secular education to entertainment to politics to business.

- (c) Insofar as their work is concerned, denominational churches are more patterned after country clubs, service organizations, political parties, and theme parks rather than the NT.
- C. Any church that does not exist for the same purpose as the church of Christ in the NT or perform the work we see Christ's church performing in the NT is not the church of Christ of the NT; we must reject it from consideration!

***If I were looking for the church of Christ found in the New Testament, I would reject any church that did not have the same terms of membership as Christ's original church...***

6. **13** Terms of membership: Lessons #14 and #18

- A. Very importantly, in the New Testament, one never "joined" the church of Christ; on the contrary, "the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47).
- (1) People in the NT became members of the church of Christ; they became Christians, when the "obeyed the gospel" (Rom. 10:16).
  - (2) Luke refers to obeying the gospel as being "obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7).
  - (3) Recall that there is but "one faith" (Eph. 4:5) that was "once for all [time] delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).
- B. This means the terms of membership for Christ's true church are exclusive and are the same today as they were in the first century!
- (1) Therefore, it is essential for us to find out what constituted "obeying the gospel" or being "obedient to the faith" was in the first century.
  - (2) If we are "obedient" to that same "faith" (the "one faith"! Eph. 4:5); revealed in the NT the Lord will "add" us to His church and "save" us just like He saved those some 2,000 years ago!
- C. **14** In surveying the New Testament we find being "obedient to the faith" involved these simple steps:
- ☛ Hearing the gospel: Rom. 10:17
  - ☛ Faith: Heb. 11:6; (Jn. 8:24: "Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.")
  - ☛ Repentance of sin: **Acts 17:30:** "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent,"; **Acts 2:38:** "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."
  - ☛ Confess Christ: Matt. 10:32; **Acts 8:37:** "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."
  - ☛ Baptism: **Acts 2:38:** "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."; Gal. 3:26-27
- D. When we look at denominational churches we see quite a different picture when it comes to terms of membership:
- ☛ **Roman Catholic:** According to Catholic Answers (an official RCC source):  
 "A person is brought into full communion with the Catholic Church through reception of the three sacraments of Christian initiation—baptism, confirmation, and the holy Eucharist—but the process by which one becomes a Catholic can take different forms.  
 For adults and children who have reached the age of reason (age seven), entrance into the Church is governed by the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA), sometimes called the Order of Christian Initiation for Adults (OCIA)."
  - ☛ **United Methodist Church:** According to their official website:

"If you were baptized as an infant or young child and have not made a profession of faith and been confirmed, then you will prepare to reaffirm your baptism when you take the membership vows."

"If you are a member of another part of the church (such as Baptist, Presbyterian or Lutheran), then you can transfer your membership from that church to a local United Methodist Church."

"If you are a member of another Christian church that does not transfer membership, you can make a profession of faith and be received as a member."

- ☛ Lutheran Church (LCMS): according to Grace Lutheran Church one must be baptized as a child (or adult) and confirmed as an adult (take instruction so that one may affirm they believe the teachings of the LCMS church.).

E. \*\* In general here is the picture:

- ☛ New Testament: Hear→believe→baptized→saved (**Acts 18:8**: "...the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.").
- ☛ Denominations: Baptized→hear→believe→saved or Believe→saved

F. Any church that does not have the same terms of membership as the church of Christ in the NT is not the church of Christ we find in the NT; we must reject it from consideration!

***If I were looking for the church of Christ found in the New Testament, I would reject any church that did not possess the most important aspect of Christ's original church...***

7. **15** Members conformed to the image of Christ:

- A. We can imitate every aspect we've already mentioned of the church of Christ in the in the New Testament yet still fail to duplicate the ancient church.
- B. How? Members of Christ's church in the New Testament were dedicated to conforming themselves to the image of Christ! So must we!
- C. It is impossible in the scope of this lesson to delineate and categorize every way the members of Christ's original church conformed themselves to the image of Christ. I offer a few:

☛ **"walk in newness of life":**

**Rom. 6:4**: "Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

**Gal. 2:20**: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

**1 Pet. 4:3-5**: "For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles — when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. 4 In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you."

☛ **"crucify the flesh":**

**Gal. 5:24**: "And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."; Col. 3:5-10: "Mortify therefore your members which are on the earth..."

☛ **"living sacrifice":**

**Rom. 12:1-2**: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..."

☛ **“perfecting holiness”:**

**2 Cor. 7:1:** “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

☛ **“love one another”:**

**Jn. 13:34-35:** “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another ; as I have loved you, that you also love one another . 35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

**1 Jn. 3:16:** “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”

☛ **16 “look out...for the interest of others”:**

**Phil. 2:3-4:** “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”

☛ **“do good and share”:**

**Heb. 13:16:** “But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.”

**1 Jn. 3:17:** “But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?”

☛ **“walk...as He walked”:**

**1 Jn. 2:6:** “He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.”

**1 Cor. 11:1:** “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.”

**“pure and undefiled religion”:**

**Jas. 1:27:** “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.”

- D. **17** Faithful members of Christ’s church in the New Testament were dedicated to reflecting these characteristics in their daily lives.
- (1) They dedicated themselves to “giving all diligence” in growing in the faith (1 Pet. 1:5-11. **2 Pet. 3:14:** “Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless;”).
  - (2) They were “steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.” (1 Cor. 15:58).
- E. We learned in lesson #9 that when members of Christ church in the NT refused to walk in the ways of the Lord, the church exercised “discipline” on its members.
- (1) By encouraging them, admonishing them, and warning them (**2 Tim. 4:2:** “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.”).
  - (2) And, if that failed, they would withdraw fellowship from them (**2 Thess. 3:6:** “But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.”).
  - (3) They took being a Christian a serious matter! Because it is! **1 Cor. 5:5:** “deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”
- F. There is no guarantee that being a member of the church of Christ one will follow the ways of Christ perfectly.

- (1) Just as there is no guarantee that members of denominational churches don't sometimes live better lives than members of Christ's church.
  - (2) But it has been my experience that denominational churches will tolerate a great deal of sin among its members (e.g., drinking alcohol, dancing, immodest attire, homosexuality, divorce for any cause, etc.).
  - (3) The church of Christ in the NT did not tolerate such things! **2 Thess. 3:14-15:** "*And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. 15 Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.*"
- G. If we would truly imitate the church of Christ we read about in the Bible it is essential we imitate the character demanded by the teachings of Christ.
- (1) We should do so not in a prideful way so we can claim we are better than others.
  - (2) But rather we should do so because it is essential to be humbly obedient to Christ! Jn. 14:15

### III. CONCLUSION:

1. Does the church of Christ exist today?
2. YES! Anyone can be the church of Christ just like we read about in the NT ***IF*** they will follow the NT as their only guide!
3. Imagine what it would take to establish a denominational church?!
4. But we, or anyone, can be a part of the church of Christ in the NT if we will:
  - ☛ Worship: "in spirit and truth"; follow the simple pattern in the NT.
  - ☛ Organization: saints, elders, deacons.
  - ☛ Constitution: New Testament, "doctrine of Christ," "the gospel," "the faith," "one faith."
  - ☛ Purpose: "saved" added to the church; those reconciled to God in the body of Christ.
  - ☛ Work: evangelism, edification, benevolence to "needy saints" only.
  - ☛ Terms of membership: hear, believe, repent, confess Christ, baptism.
5. Only one church fits the description of the church of Christ in the NT: the church that follows that divine pattern.
  - A. No one has an exclusive franchise on that pattern, on the truth!
  - B. Therefore, anyone willing to "make all things according to the pattern" (Heb. 8:5); willing to follow only the NT will duplicate the church of Christ in the NT.
6. Reject any church not following that divinely given pattern! Accept no substitutes!

### References:

- Caldwell, G. C., *Truth Commentaries: Ephesians*, Guardian of Truth Foundation, Bowling Green, KY (1994).
- Chumbley, Kenneth L. (editor), *The Church of Jesus Christ*, Florida College Press, Temple Terrace, FL (2011).
- Cogdell, Gaston D. and Robert F. Turner, *The Cogdell-Turner Discussion: A Search For Truth*, Guardian of Truth Foundation, Fairmount, IN (1983).
- Cogdill, Roy, *The New Testament Church*, Guardian of Truth Foundation, Bowling Green, KY (date unknown).
- Cogdill, Roy, *Walking By Faith*, The Gospel Guardian Company, Lufkin, TX (1957).

Patton, M., *Truth Commentaries: 1-2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, Guardian of Truth Foundation, Bowling Green, KY (1994).

Smitherman, David, *The Church in the New Testament* (from a series of 12 articles; source and date unknown).

Stauffer, L. A., *The Church: A Biblical Perspective*, Guardian of Truth Foundation, Bowling Green, KY (2006).