

How Is the Church of Christ Different?

Colossians 1:19-23

I. INTRODUCTION: I

1. **2** Conformity is the name of the game in our society when it comes to education, business, and politics.
2. Nearly every sector of society seeks to enforce the “politically correct” party line.
3. But when it comes to religion conformity can cost you your soul. Did you know that?
4. Those who visit our services observe very quickly that we’re different from every other church.
 - A. You don’t have to be a rocket scientist to see that the Lord’s church is different in many respects from all the various religious organizations in the world today.
 - B. **3** So I want to take a look at some of the differences between us and those round about us.

II. DISCUSSION:

I. **4** *Different from paganism:*

A. Paganism believes there are many gods.

(1) For example, they believe that the sky is a god, and the trees are a god, the sun and the moon are gods, you may be a god – just pick out a god and that’s your god – that’s paganism in a nutshell.

(2) Paul encountered paganism when he preached in Athens:

Acts 17:22-23: *“Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, ‘Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; 23 for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD,’”*

B. But the church of Christ is different from that because we believe there is only one God:

1 Cor. 8:6: *“But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.”*

Eph. 4:6: *“One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”*

(1) In Acts 17 when Paul went into the city of Athens he observed that all sorts of idols had been set up and there was even one that said ‘TO THE UNKNOWN GOD’ in case they left out one – that’s Paganism.

(2) Paganism is a morally and spiritually bankrupt system of philosophy.

(a) Paganism violates common sense (**Isa. 44:9-20; v. 20:** *“A deceived heart has turned him aside; and he cannot deliver his soul,”*).

(b) When followed it produces a sinful and depraved society (Rom. 1:20ff).

(c) Paul unequivocally rejected it and proclaimed to the Athenians:

Acts 17:23-31: *“Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: 24 God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. 25 Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. 26 And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, 27 so*

that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; 28 for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' 29 Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. 30 Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, 31 because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

2. **5** Different from atheism:

A. Atheism denies that there is a God but the Bible teaches otherwise.

- (1) The Bible teaches that God was, is, and will always be.
- (2) All you have to read is the very first verse to recognize that.

Gen. 1:1: "In the beginning (Do you know what the next word is?) God created the Heaven and the earth."

- (3) And from this verse forward to the end of the Bible (from Genesis to Revelation) God is upheld as being in existence.

B. Atheists enjoys mocking God; they reject the obvious evidence of His existence:

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, so that they are without excuse,"

- (1) They mock God as merely a capricious, racist, misogynistic 'superman': they don't realize God is very different than man!

Isa. 55:8-9: "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,' says the LORD. 9 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.'"

- (2) They fail to realize God is a 'spirit' being (Jn. 4:24; Lk. 24:39); He lives in eternity. Therefore, whenever you think about God being in existence a good passage to remember is **Psalm 90:1-2:** "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God."

- (3) That means that God is eternal – He's not bound by time or space like we are.

- (4) He's always existed. **Psalm 19:1:** "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork."

C. For one reason or another, man does not like to entertain thoughts that God exists despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary:

Rom. 1:20-22: "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools."

- (1) Those who embrace humanism or materialism today say there is no God (**Psa. 14:1:** "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'").

- (2) However, we believe that there is and that it's in Him that "we live and move and have our very being" (Acts 17:28).
- (3) In fact, we cannot please God unless we believe that He is and "is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6).

D. So we differ from the Atheist along those lines.

- (1) You know, there are a lot of Atheists in our country.
- (2) One atheist said, "I don't believe in anything I cannot see." Somebody asked him, "Have you ever seen your brain? How about your heart or your lungs?"
- (3) Just because you can't observe something firsthand doesn't mean it doesn't exist.
- (4) So it's hard to believe that people are Atheists in the absolute, real sense of the word.
- (5) Men won't be dead but for a second before they recognize that there is a God and that He is alive: **Phil. 2:9-11**: "Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, 11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."
- (6) Atheism too is a morally and spiritually bankrupt system of philosophy.

3. **6** Different from Judaism:

A. Number three, we also differ from Judaism. What is Judaism someone asked?

- (1) Judaism was the religion God gave to the nation of Israel in the Old Testament.
- (2) The Israelites were descendants of Abraham and were God's chosen people:
Deut. 7:6: "For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth."

B. Judaism was the divine religion in the OT; but it was only temporary (Gal. 3:24-25).

- (1) Like ancient Judaism, modern Judaism denies that Jesus Christ is the Messiah.
Jn. 1:11: "He came unto his own, and his own received him not."
- (2) In other words, they didn't believe that He was the Son of God (**1 Jn. 2:22-23**: "Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. 23 Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.").

C. But, as members of the Lord's church, we believe Jesus Christ is in fact God's own Son.

- (1) We believe what it says in **John 3:16**: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."
Jn. 20:30-31: "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."
- (2) We believe that He is, that He lived as a man upon this earth for a period of about 33 years, died on the cross having shed His blood for the sins of the world, was buried, resurrected, ascended into Heaven, and is on the right hand of God's throne even today.

D. You know, not every religious body believes that.

- (1) Modern day Judaism does not believe in Jesus Christ the same way we do.

- (2) They admit he lived but that he was only a good man (maybe even a prophet) but that's all – they deny His deity.
- (3) They don't believe in the New Testament and are still waiting for the Messiah to come and establish an earthly kingdom. How sad they reject their one and only Savior! They await a Savior that will come, but not to save them!

Jn. 14:6: "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'"

Parable of the landowner and his vineyard: **Matt. 21:33-45; vv. 40-41:** "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?" 41 They said to Him, 'He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons.'"

E. And so it's along those lines that we differ very strongly from Judaism; it too is a morally and spiritually bankrupt system.

4. **7** Different from Catholicism:

A. Not only do we differ from Paganism, Atheism, and Judaism we also differ from Catholicism.

B. By Catholicism I mean of course the *Roman Catholic Church*.

- (1) If you listen to a Roman Catholic Priest they will tell you that the Roman Catholic Church was the first church ever to be established but that's not the truth.
- (2) How do I know?
 - (a) Because Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, "I will build My church." He says nothing about establishing the *Roman Catholic Church*.
 - (b) In fact, the words "Roman Catholic" are not found even one time in the Bible.
 - (c) They say Catholic means universal and the Catholic Church is the universal church.
 - (d) So, why do they use the name "Roman Catholic Church"? I don't know, perhaps it's to distinguish their denomination from dozens of other churches claiming to the "Catholic" church?!

C. Actually, the Catholic Church was the first church to be established – but it was the first man-made church to be established.

- (1) The Catholic Church was the result of the apostasy that took place among the eldership of the church of Christ.
- (2) In Acts 20:28-31 Paul addressed the Ephesian elders:

Acts 20:28-31: "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. 29 For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. 31 Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears."
- (3) He said "I warned you night and day with tears" about the fact that eventually they were going to leave the truth.

(4) History proved that to be the case and the church gradually went astray:

2 Thess. 2:7: "For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work..."

- (4) That Scripture was fulfilled in A.D. 606 in the development of the Universal Bishop known as the Pope who exercises authority over the entire *Roman Catholic Church* and claims to be God on earth.

2 Thess. 2:3-4: “Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, 4 who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.”

- (a) He claims to be the head of the church on earth and when he speaks he speaks by divine authority (or so he claims).
- (b) He can't make a mistake and he claims authority over every human being on the face of the earth when it comes to religious and even civil affairs (e.g., *Syllabus of 1870*).
- (c) Modern Catholicism has relaxed on that in recent years but when you review their teaching that's what it claims and they have never rejected it as false.

D. **8** Catholicism determines truth in very different ways than the church of Christ:

- (1) First, they determine truth by their own translation of the Bible called the *Douay Version*.
 - (a) It includes the Apocrypha, a group of uninspired books.
 - (b) But the big problem with that translation is all the footnotes – you read a passage and they'll tell you what it means.
 - (c) You can learn the “truth” from the *Douay Version* but you have to ignore all the footnotes and commentary.
- (2) The second way is through tradition – teachings that Roman Catholic scholars and theologians have handed down through the years becomes authoritative for them.
 - (a) Tradition carries more weight in the RCC than the Bible. Did you know that?
 - (b) In other words, they put more emphasis on what's been handed down by their forefathers.
 - (c) A Cardinal by the name of James Gibbons once said, “*Scriptures alone are not sufficient because they do not contain all the truth that's necessary for salvation.*” (*Faith of Our Fathers*, pg. 90).
- (3) Number three, they also have what they refer to as the “living voice of the Church.” If the Church decides something then that's it.

E. The church of Christ realizes and teaches the Scriptures are our only source of authority.

- (1) When faced with a question we ask the question Paul asked in Romans 4:3 and Galatians 4:30 when he said, “*What saith the scriptures?*” Not what tradition says, or the Pope says, or the Church says!
- (2) We believe passages like **2 Timothy 3:16-17** which says, “*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*”
- (3) In Jude 3 Jude uttered these words: “*Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.*” cf. Jn. 14, 15, 16:13; 1 Cor. 2:9-13

- F. So the church of Christ differs from the RCC and other churches in that we believe the Scriptures are sufficient and able to completely equip us for every good work.
- (1) Catholics refer to this as the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* which simply means the Scriptures alone are sufficient.
 - (2) They deny *Sola Scriptura* despite the fact the Bible teaches it!
 - (3) We believe Jesus Christ "...is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence." (Col. 1:18). Not the Pope!
 - (4) The Catholic Church believes they are the one, true church and they require men and women, boys and girls of every nation throughout the entire world to submit to their authority, to their traditions, to their superstitions in order to be saved!
 - (5) We deny all that for obvious reasons.

5. **9** Different from Protestant Denominationalism:

- A. The church of Christ also differs from Protestant Denominationalism.
- (1) The term "Protestant" came into being during the *Reformation Movement* when men protested against Roman Catholicism.
 - (2) Because of that they were nicknamed "Protestants" because they protested against the RCC.
- B. The church of Christ is not a Protestant Denomination even though we protest against the false teachings of the RCC.
- (1) The protestant movement only succeeded in creating man-made churches when men like Martin Luther and John Calvin defected from the RCC.
 - (2) The *Lutheran Church* was the first denomination to be created and it started about 1500 years too late to be the New Testament church.
 - (3) In fact every Protestant Denomination is at least a thousand years too young to be the church that the Bible talks about!
- C. Up until now this religious division has resulted in over 40,000 different so-called Christian denominations in the world today according to some recent surveys.
- (1) Most of these religious bodies have their own creed book written by men.
 - (2) The church of Christ doesn't need one – we have the Bible (1 Pet. 4:11).
 - (3) These creed books differ and in many cases they contradict one another and even contradict themselves.
 - (4) For example, the *Baptist Manual* says on one page that we're saved by "faith only" and on the very next page its says we're saved by "grace only."
 - (5) Which is it? You can't have it both ways! You can't be saved by faith only and grace only at the same time – so it contradicts itself.
 - (6) The Bible teaches that we're saved by grace through faith.

Eph. 2:8-10: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."

- (7) Thus, the doctrine of “faith only” is false! The book of James says that we’re saved by both *faith* and *works* (Jas. 2:14-26; v. 24: “You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.”).
 - (8) In fact, I could probably list 10-15 things the Bible says we’re saved by but we’re not saved by any of those things *alone* (1 Pet. 3:21; Phil. 2:12).
 - (9) So their doctrine contradicts itself and they contradict each other – and yet all of them claim to be led by the Holy Spirit.
- D. So the church of Christ is different from protestant denominationalism in that we speak where the Bible speaks and are silent where the Bible is silent (1 Pet. 4:11).
- (1) We call Bible things by Bible names and do Bible things in Bible ways.
 - (2) The Bible is our ONLY standard of authority. Can you beat that? I don’t think you can!
 - (3) Jesus said, “All power (or authority) is given unto me in heaven and in earth.” (Matt. 28:18).
 - (4) His word will be the standard at the Judgment according to **John 12:48** where it says, “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.”
 - (5) It was said concerning Jesus in Matthew 7:29, “For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”
 - (a) Even His critics recognized that.
 - (b) That means we need to have respect for divine authority and that’s our standard today! Col. 3:17 (Matt. 17:5; Heb. 1:1-3)
- E. The church of Christ that meets in this place is not a denomination; neither is it Catholic or Protestant, nor is it connected with any sect of Judaism! It is simply a part of the church Jesus promised to build (Matt. 16:18).
6. **10** Different from most Churches of Christ:
- A. Finally, the church of Christ is different from many churches of Christ.
 - B. Not every church of Christ is a church of Christ in the real sense of the word.
 - (1) Paul identified the church in Romans 16:16: “The churches of Christ salute you.”
 - (2) However, some churches of Christ teach and practice things not found in the Bible.
 - (3) We have some churches of Christ around here that have instrumental music in their worship services, women preachers, unscriptural elders, they provide entertainment and recreation, and do all kinds of things that cannot be found on the pages of the Bible.
 - C. So just because a church puts a sign on the building saying “Church of Christ” actually means very little.
 - (1) They’re just like people. Many claim to be Christians and proudly wear the name.
 - (2) But when the “rubber meets the road” they don’t dress like Christians, they don’t talk like Christians and they don’t act like Christians..
 - (3) The same is true for churches. Wearing the name is easy! But, it’s something entirely different to be the real article!
 - (4) Some of these churches have gotten so far away from the truth they’re basically just another human denomination (i.e., glorified social service organizations, country clubs).

- (5) Sherry and I have lived on both the east coast and west coast; near the Canadian border and near the Gulf of Mexico; and right here in the good old Midwest.
 - (a) The vast majority of churches claiming to be a “Church of Christ” are nothing more than another denomination.
 - (b) They range from quite conservative to quite liberal, but they all have one thing in common: They do not “*abide in the doctrine of Christ*” (2 Jn. 9); they do not follow the scriptures (Col. 3:17; 1 Pet. 4:11).

III. CONCLUSION: !!

1. I’ll leave you with one more Scripture:

1 Pet. 2:9-10: *“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.”*

2. Did you catch that? He said we’re a peculiar people.

A. Do you know what it means to be peculiar? It means to be different. That’s what this sermon’s all about.

B. We’re different!

(1) It’s not that we just made up our minds to swim against the current; to be intentionally antagonistic to society.

(2) We’re not different just to be different. We’re not different just to be cantankerous and hard to get along with.

C. ** We’re different because we’ve chosen to follow the Bible ALONE! It’s as simple as that.

(1) Those simply following the Scriptures are in a very, very tiny minority.

Matt. 7:13-14: *“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. 14 Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”*

(2) So I hope you appreciate that point.

(a) Back in the Old Testament the Israelite nation wanted to be like the nations around about them and that was their downfall.

(b) They rejected the pattern God had given them.

(c) If you can’t stand being different, you’ll never make it as a Christian!

D. May God help us to never want to become like the churches round about us.

E. Invitation