

Lesson 1

What Is the Church of Christ?

Establishing Authority

To answer the question “what is the church of Christ,” we need to provide Bible answers. Sure, we could answer from a human perspective and the perspectives of many different religious people; but to be accurate we must appeal to the scriptures. Any study of any kind in religious matters should start with the determination to follow the correct authority. This lesson will be about how to approach and determine our standard of authority

Following Jesus without denominationalism begins by heeding the call of the gospel. We will speak of this gospel throughout this book. We know that the Lord “calls” us through His gospel (**2 Thessalonians 2:14**). As we respond to the call, the Lord Himself adds us to His church (His “called-out” group of people), not a man-made denomination (**Acts 2:41, 47**).

If we are to be simply Christians, members of the Lord’s church as we read about in the New Testament, then we must follow the example of the early church who “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine...” (**Acts 2:42**). This is what

we call **AUTHORITY IN RELIGION**.

It is impossible to maintain unity in any organization or government unless we can agree upon a “standard” of authority. This is true in all areas of life. Imagine a society that did not have laws to express the will of the people or to control those who might go against the will of the people. Imagine the confusion if we did not have a standard of authority relating to weights and measures. We could not even agree on the length of a line, the volume of a tank of gasoline, etc. Confusion would reign supreme in the market place if we did not all agree on one standard of authority in regards to weights and measures.

An essential key to having unity on any subject is this: **WE MUST ACCEPT AND SUBMIT TO THE SAME STANDARD OF AUTHORITY!**

This is especially true in matters of religion. If people can agree on the standard of authority in religious matters, unity is possible when we submit to that same standard. There are other elements necessary to have unity, but without a standard of authority upon which we all agree, unity is impossible! What should be the standard of authority for Christ’s church? Let’s begin with a point with which I am sure all those professing to be Christians can agree.

JESUS CHRIST HAS BEEN GIVEN ALL AUTHORITY. This was the claim He made for Himself. He claimed all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him (**Matthew 28:18**). He said His words would judge us (**John 12:48**). He therefore expects us to observe all things He has commanded (**Matthew 28:19-20**).

His apostles taught that Jesus had all authority. He is HEAD of the BODY (the church) (**Ephesians 1:22-23**). As such, we are to submit to Him in everything (**Ephesians 5:23-24**). If Jesus were on earth today, we could solve all religious questions by simply asking Him. But since He is not on earth, what then? This leads to our next point...

JESUS HAS DELEGATED AUTHORITY TO HIS APOSTLES. To receive Christ, we must receive His apostles. As Jesus taught in **John 13:20** – “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.” Please note that the word “apostle” means “one sent.” So when Jesus speaks of “whomever I send,” He has particular reference to His apostles. The apostles were sent as “ambassadors” for Christ (**2 Corinthians 5:20**). Therefore the early church “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine” (**Acts 2:42**).

TO ENSURE RELIABILITY, JESUS PROMISED THE HOLY SPIRIT TO HIS APOSTLES. The Spirit would do several things. Jesus told His disciples in **John 14:26**, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.” And Jesus said in **John 16:12-13**, “I have more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.”

We learn that the Holy Spirit did what Jesus said it would do because Paul said that he taught “the WHOLE counsel of God” (**Acts 20:27**). Peter wrote that God “has given to us ALL

THINGS that pertain to life and godliness" (**2 Peter 1:3**). So the apostles were given ALL the truth God (and Christ) wanted us to know. If the apostles were on earth today, we could simply ask them to settle religious differences. But again, they are not on earth. What then?

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, THE APOSTLES HAVE WRITTEN WHAT CHRIST WANTS US TO KNOW! In the Bible, we have what the Spirit wanted us to know. **2 Peter 1:21** – "For no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." Paul wrote, so that when we read his writings we can have his same understanding that has been revealed to him **Ephesians 3:1-5**. Peter wrote his epistles that we might always be reminded (**2 Peter 1:12-15; 3:1-2**). Paul said much the same thing in **Philippians 3:1** when he said such reminder was a safeguard for us.

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, WE HAVE THE COMMANDMENTS OF THE LORD HIMSELF. As Paul made clear in **1 Corinthians 14:37**: "If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment." As Peter confirmed, such writings as Paul's were considered Scripture (**2 Peter 3:15-16**).

Therefore, when we have questions about what the Lord would have us to do, We don't have to ascend to heaven for an answer. We don't have to ask Jesus personally, nor His apostles. We simply need to turn to the apostles' writings (i.e., the New Testament)!

THE NEW TESTAMENT IS THE WORD OF CHRIST. In the New Testament, the repository of the "apostles' doctrine," is where we can turn to learn the will of Jesus, given through

His selected and inspired ambassadors, the apostles. Also remember that the letters of the apostles were instructions to Christians how they should live and how they should function in the church.

But this raises other questions: Is the New Testament a complete guide for us today? Is it sufficient? In other words – do we need more than the Bible? Sadly, those in the denominations reject that the Bible is sufficient; they feel we need more than the Bible. Some are even so bold as to claim the Bible is obsolete and unnecessary. Many have chosen to just pick and choose what part of the Bible they will follow and others will just follow public opinion when deciding their course of action. What does the Bible say on this?

THE NEW TESTAMENT IS A COMPLETE, ALL-SUFFICIENT GUIDE. It must be complete. For “THE FAITH” has been revealed once for all (**Jude 3**). “Once for all” literally means “one time for all time.” We cannot expect further revelation in the future (as of the time of the writing it came from). The writings of the apostles as collected in the New Testament are all we have. And that is sufficient. Our task, is not to look for further revelation, but to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints”! Whenever someone claims to have a new revelation, we see that such new revelation contradicts what God has already spoken. That causes confusion, and God is not the author of confusion (**1 Corinthians 14:33**).

ACCORDING TO THE APOSTLES THEMSELVES, THESE WRITINGS (SCRIPTURES) ARE INDEED SUFFICIENT! Sufficient to make one complete, furnished unto every good work (**2 Timothy 3:16-17**). They provide all we need to

enjoy life and godliness (**2 Peter 1:3**). By heeding the writings of the apostles we will have the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (**2 Peter 1:8-9**). An abundant entrance will be supplied into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (**2 Peter 1:10-11**).

ALL WE ARE LEFT WITH IS GOD'S PROVIDENCE AND HIS WORD. As Paul prepared the elders of the church at Ephesus for his departure, he commended them to God and the word of His grace (**Acts 20:32**). He did not instruct them to appoint apostles to take his place. He did not instruct them to seek or expect further revelation. Paul had already proclaimed "the whole counsel of God" to them (**Acts 20:27**). Paul had already given them everything that was profitable (**Acts 20:20**). Paul simply directed the elders to two things: To God Himself (i.e., His Divine Providence), and the word of His grace (that word which had been revealed by Paul himself) (**Acts 20:32**). These two blessings, Paul was confident, were able to do two things: Build them up, and give them an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

Conclusion

The "New Testament," then, is how: Christ speaks to us today. He leads us to life everlasting! It is through the writing of the apostles, the "apostles' doctrine," that the Lord speaks and directs His Church! It is the "apostles' doctrine" that is the standard of authority in matters of religion. It is the "apostles' doctrine" in which we must "continue steadfastly" (**Acts 2:42**)! There is more to be said about "authority in religion," which we will cover in future lessons.

Questions

1. Why is it necessary to have only one standard of authority?
2. Who has all authority? What does that mean?
3. Who has Jesus delegated His authority to?
4. Do we follow Bible authority or Christ's authority? Explain the difference.

Lesson 2

What Is the Church of Christ?

The Universal Church

When we are asked the question: “What is the church of Christ,” we must realize it is a valid question that deserves a proper answer. There are different ways to answer the question. We could answer from the world’s view, or we could answer from the denominational view, or we could answer from an internal view (from our own members). But the proper way to answer any question about the church or any religious subject is to use **THE BIBLICAL VIEW**. And we must remember that the Biblical view is the very teaching of Christ.

Explanation of this view is necessary to understand our subject. When it comes to describing the church, what the Biblical view is. The answer is two-fold from the Bible. There is the Church of Christ in the “universal” sense. There is the Church Of Christ in the “Local church” sense. Both are described in the Bible.

Let us look at the sense of the “Universal Church” first.

The Universal church is composed of all Christians. The church to which Jesus referred in **Matthew 16:18** – “...upon

this foundation (or rock) (Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God) I (Jesus) will build My church.” It is made up all the saved, both living and dead (**Hebrews 12:22-24**) – “general assembly and church of the first born enrolled in heaven.”

There is just one universal church. The universal church is called the “body” of Christ (**Ephesians 1:22-23**) – “And He (God) put all things in subjection under His (Jesus) feet, and gave Him (Jesus) as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” There is only one “body” (**Ephesians 4:4**); therefore, only one church!

The universal church began on the Day of Pentecost. It began in Jerusalem, following the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ (**Acts 2:1-47**). It began as the fulfillment of prophecy (**Daniel 2; Isaiah 2**). The apostle Peter later referred to this day, as the “beginning” (**Acts 11:15**).

Entrance to the universal church is by being added by the Lord. One cannot “join” the church by their own volition. Neither can one merit themselves into God’s church. We often see the phrase “join the church of your choice” or “worship at the church of your choice.” But we do not have a choice if we are to be right before God. Rather, they are “added” by the Lord Himself when saved. **Acts 2:41** – “added about 3000 souls.” **Acts 2:47** – “adding daily those being saved.”

The Lord keeps the books of membership. There is no agency on earth that keeps the registry of true member’s enrollment in heaven; only the Lord knows those who are truly His. **Hebrews 12:23** – “...enrolled in heaven...” They are enrolled in the “Lambs Book of Life” (**Revelation 20:15**). **2 Timothy 2:19** – “the Lord knows those who are His...”

The universal church consists of all the saved. The Lord is presenting to Himself a church holy and without blemish (**Ephesians 5:25-27**). Those in the church who are sinning and refuse to repent are “cut off” (**John 15:2, 6**), “cast out,” (**Romans 11:19-22**), “spewed out” (**Revelation 3:16**), and once again cast out of the relationship (until such time they repent and return to God).

Must be in this universal church to be saved. For the Lord is the Savior of the “body” (which is His church) (**Ephesians 5:23**). Since the Lord adds one to His church when they are saved, one cannot be saved and not be in the church universal!

The universal church has no earthly organization. The church universal has an organization (**Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:5**). The scripture plainly says that Christ is the head of the church, and that is all the organization we need (**Ephesians 1:22**). What organization that does exist is spiritual in nature. E.g., Christ as the cornerstone, together with His apostles and prophets as the foundation (**Ephesians 2:20**), and all Christians as “living stones” (**1 Peter 2:4-8**).

There is no earthly headquarters for the church. No telephone number to call to speak with the “head” of the church. For the Head and His headquarters are in heaven! We find that prayer is the only communication we have to speak to Him. And He responds to His faithful, righteous ones. And God has spoken through His word, and given us the instructions we need to function properly as His church.

The universal church can't be divided. For there is no earthly organization to divide! If division appears to exist;

some unscriptural organization of churches must have been created. God did not create them, so man must have done so. Such organizations can have division, but not the Lord's church universal! Those who would seek to divide the church through doctrine, conduct, etc., are simply cut off by the Lord Himself! There is and always will be, "one body" (**Ephesians 4:4**)! And we need to make sure we are remaining faithful to be in it!

Death doesn't affect membership in the universal church. The church universal is made up of the saved, both living and dead (**Hebrews 12:22-23**). If faithful, when one dies, they are still with Christ (**Philippians 1:21-23; 1 Thessalonians 5:10**)! We are told that the faithful will always be with the Lord (**1 Thessalonians 4:17**).

The universal church does not have one official name. No one exclusive name or term is used to describe the universal church. Various terms used include church of God, body, kingdom, etc. (**1 Corinthians 10:32; Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:13**). We choose to keep the name "church of Christ," as we recognize it belongs to Him.

Conclusion

We have looked at many factors concerning the universal church. In our next lesson, we will look at factors concerning the local church. We will do our best to explain the differences, because there has been much confusion in separating the two.

Questions

1. Who is in the Universal church?
2. How do people join this church?
3. Based on this lesson, is the universal church perfect?
4. If there are problems, who creates them?
5. There are many names by which the church can be described that are scripturally accurate. Begin listing them below.

This is a sample of the material contained in
*The True Church of the Bible: Examining the Error
of Denominationalism*
by Carey W. Scott

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