

"The church of Christ"

Occasionally people ask me questions about the church. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders. And this is a Bible study, "In Search of the Lord's Way." Many years ago, I actually became a member of the church that Jesus built, the one you can read about in the New Testament. To find out more, stay with us.

Welcome to In Search of the Lord's Way. We search the Scriptures, because we know God has revealed the truth in them. God's Word is pure and holy; it never teaches anything but what is good and acceptable and perfect. When we follow God's Word, we show Him our love and our loyalty. The more we study His Word, the more we love Him. The more we love Him, the more we want to give our hearts to Him. When we obey Him from the heart, the Lord is pleased. Thanks for taking time with us today; we want to be a part of your life each week.

The church Jesus built, the one you read about in the New Testament, came to earth in identifiable, local congregations. They were like families in various locations, meeting each first day of the week to worship. They ate their meals together, they took care of their needy, and they served the Lord. Acts 2 and verse 42 says, "They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." To be the church Jesus built today, congregations must seek to follow the examples of what God desires. We can know what God instructs by examining the New Testament.

The Lord's teaching was not merely for the first century; He gave it for all time. And that teaching is preserved for us in written form in the New Testament, so that people in every age might know God's will. What God desired in the first century, He desires today. And if the Lord gave us this model in the Word, shouldn't we follow it? Jesus said in Luke 6 and verse 46, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?" Because we call Jesus our Lord, we follow Him and we obey His words.

Now this month we're offering a free a booklet, entitled, "Christ's Glorious Church." If you want a copy or a CD of today's message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also stream this program on our website at www.searchtv.org.

The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from Ephesians 4:1 to 6, and we'll examine the church of Christ.

Our scripture reading today comes from Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, chapter 4, verses 1 through 6. "Therefore, I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all." That's a reading from God's Holy Word. Let's pray together. Father, we're thankful that You are our Father, and that we have Your Son Jesus who has loved us so much. Father help us to be one, and to be humble in heart and in mind. And may Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen.

As members of the Lord's church, our heart's desire is to believe in and to obey the Lord Jesus. We don't want to add to His words or take away from them. We want to believe and practice everything He taught and nothing else. When we became Christians, we recognized Jesus Christ as our only Lord. Colossians 3 verse 17 says, "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the

Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” We must act in His name and by His authority, because we belong to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now some encyclopedias say the church of Christ began in America in the early 1800s with men such as Thomas and Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone; but Campbell and Stone cannot establish something that’s already been established. I’ve never claimed membership in any church but the church that Jesus established at Pentecost in 30 A.D. I wasn’t baptized in the name of Campbell or Stone. Neither of them was crucified for me. In fact, I didn’t even know about them until years after I was baptized. I believe in the Lord Jesus and was baptized in His name. I’ve taken up my cross to follow Jesus. He is my Lord and the only head of His church. Churches of Christ look to Him alone as our Savior and Lord.

Today there are more than 12,000 local churches of Christ across the United States. Like the churches of the New Testament these congregations look to Jesus as their Lord and Savior. They don’t have bylaws or a manual that they use in addition to the New Testament. They don’t have a headquarters or an organization that’s over the local congregations. They don’t meet annually to make official statements of the church or to make binding theological decisions. Now while these congregations recognize one another as brethren, they are autonomous, that is self-ruling. Each congregation has its own leaders made up of elders and deacons, who follow the Bible in their teaching and practice.

Now should you visit one of these congregations on a Sunday morning, you’ll find a warm welcome. Churches of Christ are spiritual families who come together in a common faith, hope, and love. They’re brothers and sisters to one another, and there is room in their hearts for someone new. They care about your soul, your well-being, and your family. Churches of Christ generally have Bible classes for all ages on Sunday mornings. And these classes study the Bible closely to learn the truth about God and how we should serve Him.

Churches of Christ gather each Lord’s day, which is the first day of the week or Sunday, to worship the Lord. They look to the Scriptures to see how God wants them to worship. They pattern their worship today after the examples and instructions given in the New Testament.

Now worship is a time to draw near to God and to express our love, our praise, and our thanksgiving to God. Worshiping God reminds us of how holy God is and how we stand in need of His grace and forgiveness. Worship is a time of humility and reverence toward God.

Christian worship to the Lord consists first of prayers. 1 Timothy 2 verses 1 and 2 says, “First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.” As Christians we pray for those in need. We thank God for all His blessings and for peace. We pray for strength, courage, and comfort. We even pray for our enemies. We pray especially that God will open up a door for the Word, so that men may learn the will of God.

During worship we enjoy the reading of Scripture. Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 4 and verse 13, “Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.” Now scripture nourishes our hearts and it builds us up. Paul told the elders of the church at Ephesus in Acts 20 and verse 32, “And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” Now God’s Word builds us up and gives us our inheritance. We need God’s Word in our lives every day.

Churches of Christ sing from their hearts, because they want to praise God and they want to edify one another. Ephesians 5:18 to 19 says, “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be

filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord." Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God."

The music in Christian worship in the New Testament was by means of vocal singing, and every member of the congregation participates. The New Testament gives no example or instruction for Christians to worship with instruments of music. You see, we seek to follow the New Testament teaching in all things, so we simply sing. We know this pleases God, because the early church didn't use instruments of music in worship for many, many centuries. Since our worship is to glorify God, our desire is to please Him by following His instructions in the New Testament for Christian worship. Hebrews 13 and verse 15 says, "Through Him (that is through Jesus) then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name."

Now each Lord's Day, the first day of the week, we commune together in the Lord's Supper. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11 verses 23 to 26, "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' And in the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes." The Lord's Supper is a simple memorial meal, and every member of the church partakes. Christians remember the body and the blood of Jesus that was sacrificed for them so that they might have the forgiveness of their sins.

Each first day of the week Christians also contribute to the Lord for the work of the church. They believe 2 Corinthians 9 verses 6 and 7 where Paul said, "Now this I say, that he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." Now churches of Christ do not send out bills or they don't expect a tithe or ten percent. They urge members to give cheerfully as they have been prospered and as they purpose in their hearts.

Now during worship a preacher or minister will preach the word of God to build up and encourage brethren to live faithful and holy lives, to know the Lord and His truth, and to keep on doing good and reaching out to others with the gospel. Paul urged Timothy in 2 Timothy 4 and verse 2 to "preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction." Preachers have the responsibility of persuading the lost to come to Jesus and of strengthening the brethren. They must teach the whole counsel of God, and that means they must speak against what is false and immoral. They must call men to repent of their sins and to follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now the church is a family made up of brothers and sisters. In fact, 1 Peter 2 and verse 17 tells us to "love the brotherhood." Now no one is above or better than anyone else. Each member of the body is loved and valued. The Lord Jesus said to the apostles in Matthew 20 verses 25 to 28, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

The church Jesus built wasn't divided into clergy and laity. Each congregation had its own leadership - yes, and no leader held power over several congregations, that didn't happen. The idea of

an archbishop or a hierarchy over many congregations is absolutely foreign to the New Testament. It was a development brought about by men over the centuries. Now in the New Testament a plurality of elders or shepherds oversaw the work of each congregation. They didn't have a single bishop over the elders in a local church. You remember that when Diotrephes in the little book of Third John put himself first and tried to run the church, the apostle John rebuked him.

The Lord Jesus refused to let His followers to assume a title that put them above others as some of the Jews did. Jesus said in Matthew 23 verses 8 to 12, "But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ. The greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted." For this reason, ministers and others in the church of Christ refuse to be called "Reverend" or "Father," they're not going to take that title.

Now in the Lord's church every member is called a "saint"; there isn't any special class of saints above other Christians. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 1 and verse 2, "To the church of God which is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours." Now every person washed in the blood of Jesus and sanctified by the Spirit is a saint.

In the Lord's church every member is also a priest. You remember the apostle Peter said to the whole church in 1 Peter 2 and verse 9, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." Now Israel may have had a special tribe of priests, the tribe of Levi, but the church doesn't have a tribe of priests! According to 1 Peter 2 and verse 5, every Christian is a priest offering up "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Now every Christian has the task as a priest to serve God, to worship, and to teach others about God.

While the church Jesus built, the church of Christ, is not a denomination or a sect, you can find it today in identifiable congregations. You can be a member of the Lord's church! You see, the same seed, that is the Word of God, that made members of the church in the first century is what makes members of the church today. Well, what seed is that? Well, it's the Word of God, as I said. 1 Peter 1:23 says this, that Christians are "born again, not of a perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God." Now if you have the same seed, you have the same church. If you change the seed by mixing it in with human traditions and doctrines, you have something different. Oh my friend, I don't want something different. I want to stay with God's Word and I want the church to remain pure by following what is written in the Word of God. Let's pray together. Father we're so thankful that in Your wisdom and in Your love, You gave us Your Word, that seed which is able to make us Your children, sons and daughters, and allows us to be born again and to be a part of the church that Jesus died for. Help us Heavenly Father to love You, and to do what is right. And may Your will be done on earth as it is heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

The Lord Jesus, at the close of the Sermon on the Mount, said in Matthew 7:24 to 27, "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain fell, the floods came, the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, the floods came, the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it."

My friend, you're building your religious house; and what you build will determine your destiny. Be wise and build your house on the rock. How? By hearing the words of Jesus and doing them. Go to the New Testament, all of it, to find everything that Jesus taught. Don't build your house on human traditions or doctrines and then expect to have a firm foundation. Go to the Bible alone to find the rock. Now in churches of Christ, it's our passion to listen to the Lord's words found in the New Testament and simply obey them. We don't want to add to them or take anything from them.

Become a Christian by putting your faith in the Lord and obeying Him. If you love Him, turn away from every sin and serve Him; confess Him as the Christ, the Son of the living God; and be baptized, immersed in water, in His name for the forgiveness of your sins. Romans 6:3 through 7 says when we're baptized into Christ, we're baptized into His death. Now baptism unites us with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. And when we're united with Christ, God sets us free from sin, we become children of God and we become members of the Lord's church. Now churches of Christ today are simply made up of people who trust and obey the Lord according to His teaching.

Now this month we're offering a free booklet, entitled, "Christ's Glorious Church." Now if you get it, it will be a blessing to you. And if you want a copy or a CD of this message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or you can send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. You can also find us on YouTube.

Or, call the Search office toll-free. That number at 1-800-321-8633. Now our programs appear on our website at www.searchtv.org. Now if you call us, we won't ask you for money or put you on a list.

So please, we ask, that you get involved with a church of Christ. And if you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll be happy to help you find one. We want everyone to come to know the Lord, and to be a part of His church. Well we'll be back next week, Lord willing. So we ask that you keep searching God's Word with us, tell a friend about this program, let them know that you're watching and encourage them to watch too. And as always we say to you, God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.