**What Is The Church Of Christ?**

**Introduction: (Scripture Reading: Matthew 16:13-18)**

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**A. Understanding The Church Of Christ:**

1. It’s important to realize that the word church is used two different ways in the New Testament.

 a. While the word translated church is used to describe other types of secular gathering, we are concerned with how it’s used to describe groups of Christians. It is true that the word translated “church” was a common secular word in that day, but God uses it in a special way!

 b. Sometimes church is used in a universal sense – Here it speaks of saved people in general. Some have described it as “all the saved, of all time, of all nations” **(Eph. 1:22; 3:20-21; 5:23ff).** It is referred to in the NT as “the body of Christ” & “the bride of Christ” & “the kingdom” & etc

c. Sometimes it is used in a local sense, regarding a group of Christians who work & worship together in a specific place **(Acts 11:22, 26; Romans 16:16)**. These groups are sometimes described using words like “The Church at \_\_\_\_” or “the churches of Christ” or “the church of God” or “the saints in \_\_\_\_\_\_” 🡺 All of these are good & proper designations for a local church.

 d. There is an important difference in nature between the local church and the universal church. There are no lost people in the church in the universal sense… only saved people are there; however a person might be an active member of a local church and be lost. Can’t fool Christ! e. Some people have raised an issue with how some refer to “going to church” – Referring to going to the assemblies. They say, “Church is people, it’s not something you go to.” That sounds nice & preaches well, but it’s not exactly accurate. Church is used that way **(1 Cor. 14:19, 28, 34)**

 2. The Lord’s church, the church of Christ, is not a collection of churches but is a collection of people!

 a. Some have misapplied Jesus’ teaching of the vine and branches and reached an unbiblical conclusion. Some picture Jesus as being the vine and each different religious group being the branches. It’s an effort to give approval to all groups who believe in Jesus **(John 15:5)**

 b. The problem with this idea is that it isn’t what Jesus says at all! He says, “I am the vine and YOU are the branches” 🡺 He is speaking to individuals and not varying groups. This teaching in no way gives approval to the sectarian spirit that characterizes our religious landscape

 c. We will say more about this later, but we must be careful about talking and thinking as if the church of Christ was the summation of a group of certain local churches. It’s not that at all

 d. The church of Christ has no council or gathering, its only head is Christ… it has no earthly positions of authority, it doesn’t engage in a collective work, it does not teach or practice anything

 3. When Jesus was teaching His disciples, He made a promise about the church which He would build and taught about the foundation upon which it would be built **(Matthew 16:16-18)**

a. Here Peter makes a powerful confession. He is expressing his faith that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. It’s faith in Jesus as God, as the Savior of the world. Jesus wasn’t just a prophet, a good teacher, a great man… Jesus was God in the flesh. In Jesus God would save man.

 b. It was upon this faith that Jesus would build His church – His church would be made up of people who shared in the same kind of faith Peter had and would be willing to confess that faith

 c. The church of Christ is not joined & knit together by creeds, traditions, or councils. It is joined and knit together by a like precious faith. A faith that creates fellowship with God & one another

 d. This group of people is a powerful force! The gates of hades would not prevail against them! Hades is a way of saying death. The gates of death will not prevail. I don’t think this is saying that death (or Hell) cannot overcome Christ’s church. I think it is saying Christ’s church will conquer death! We’ll be the ones on the attack with Jesus leading the way! **(I Cor. 15:51-54)**

 e. Notice that Jesus said “I will build my CHURCH” – He didn’t say churches. Jesus is only the builder of one church. How can there be unity there and not have unity locally? **(Ephesians 4:4-6)**

 4. The Hebrew writer paints a glorious picture of this group of people, the church of Christ **(Heb. 12:22-24)**

a. Notice the word “assembly” used here… It’s the same word often translated “church” – The Hebrew writer is describing the church of the Firstborn. This is the church of Christ!

 b. This group of people transcends time and space. It includes people in Heaven and on earth. It includes those who lived in the time of the Patriarchs, those who lived under the Law of Moses, and those who lived under the New Covenant in Christ.

 c. To be a part of this body of people is to be a part of something greater than this life and this world. It is to be a part of something that is eternal. Something that reaches into Heaven. It is to be a citizen of the kingdom of Heaven which as Daniel prophesied would stand forever!

**B. Applying A Biblical Understanding Of The Church Of Christ:**

1. We need to be more careful about being accurate and clear in the language we use. This applies to our personal conversations and to when we are teaching or speaking before the local church **(I Cor. 14:23)**

 a. Some have described what’s called “insider language” – It is a real thing and it can be problematic when we forget that everyone isn’t coming from the position of an insider! (Examples)

 b. Do we think collectively about the church but are actually talking about a group of certain local churches… that’s not accurate. If people ask what kind of Christian we are and we say, “I’m church of Christ” …that’s not accurate. If we talk about how the church is drifting… that’s not accurate. If we talk about what the church of Christ believes or practices… that’s not accurate. If we talk about how Alexander Campbell restored the church… that’s not accurate

 c. Sometimes when we are trying to address the problem of denominationalism, we talk about the church of Christ in a way that is either inaccurate or misleading. At best people hear what we don’t mean… they hear our church vs. your church, our denomination vs. yours

 d. Do we talk about “Church of Christ” material, magazines, schools, and the like? Does the church of Christ really operate such things? At best this sounds very sectarian.

 2. This understanding is helpful as we deal with questions when we try to teach others **(Acts 2:38, 41, 47)**

 a. Have you ever been asked, “Do you believe that only members of the church of Christ will be saved?” I have been asked that many times. I hate the question because it is intentionally inflammatory in nature. It causes people to get emotional and when people get emotional they stop listening and thinking! So how do you respond when someone asks you this?

 b. Understanding what the church of Christ is, this is tantamount to asking, “Will only saved people be saved?” – Rhetorical! Of course only members of the church of Christ will be saved!

 c. Consider what happens on the day of Pentecost. The gospel is preached. People believe and seek to turn to God. They’re told to repent & be baptized in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins. When they do this, they are told they are saved. Then it says, “The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” God automatically adds saved people!

 d. Notice here the emphasis is bringing people to see Jesus as Lord and Christ. We aren’t converting them to our church. We are converting them to Christ. Sometimes we face opposition in teaching the gospel because we are trying to convert people to the wrong thing!

 3. Hopefully as we grow in our understanding of the church of Christ, we will grow in appreciation of the great body of which we are a part **(Revelation 21:9ff; Hebrews 12:25, 28-29)**

a. It is an incredible blessing & privilege to be a part of this body. We don’t deserve to be there. We are spiritually a “rags to riches” story. Do we appreciate this grace we have received?

 b. Jesus speaks through John to show us the way He sees His people – He speaks descriptively in a way to impress upon us the beauty, worth, and importance He places upon us.

 c. Notice there is application to the Hebrew’s glorious description of the church of Christ – We must obey His voice with reverence. We must have hearts filled with thankfulness which is manifest in our worship. Why? So we won’t look back and give up what God has given us!

 d. If all we see the church of Christ as is a collection of churches like ours, we won’t have the awe inspiring impressive view of Christ and His church that should exist! It won’t mean as much to us. We will lose sight of the glory and the thankfulness and reverence will fade!

 4. The most important question we can ask is how can we become a part of this great body?

 a. This group of people are those who are saved, so how are you saved? This group of people are those who are “of Christ” or “in Christ,” so what places us there? The answer is really simple.

 b. Remember what we saw from Acts 2 – People who believed, repented, and were baptized were saved. God added to their number daily those who were saved. What number? The number of the saved. This event is a perfect picture of how we join the church of Christ.

 c. Other passages that prove helpful about this: **Eph. 2:4-10; Gal. 3:26-27; Rom. 6:3-4 🡺 1 Cor 12:13**

 d. When a person obeys the gospel of Christ by faith, they are not joining the Trussville church… they are joining Christ’s church, the body of Christ. Now, a saved person may choose to become a part of this local church, but that is secondary to being in the body of Christ!