

## WHAT MAKES THE CHURCH OF CHRIST UNIQUE ?

### Int.

1. Aim: To show that the N.T. church is really unique when you examine it and compare it with all the man made denominations.
2. Eph. 4:4 One body = Eph. 1:22-23 "Church which is his body,"
3. The word unique means "being the only one of its kind."
4. Some who are members of the church of Christ say it is unique.
  - a. Is this a true claim?
  - b. Is it one of a kind ?
  - c. Are there no others like it?
  - d. Or is it just one among many ?
5. Let us examine the claim that the church of Christ is unique ! Just saying that the church of Christ is unique does not make it so. If it is unique, what makes it unique?

### Discussion

- I. THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IS NOT UNIQUE IN CONTENDING THAT THE BIBLE IS THE VERBALLY INSPIRED WORD OF GOD.

- A. This fact makes it different from many churches.
  1. Many reject the Bible account of creation, say that Adam and Eve were not real people,
  2. Also many deny the miracles of the Bible, including the virgin birth and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

- B. On Sunday, November 15, 1992, the Birmingham News had an article featuring John Shelby Spong, an Episcopal Bishop who has written a number of books attacking the Bible's authenticity. Many, if not most, members of the Episcopal Church do not agree with Bishop Spong.
- C. Many in other denominations would be surprised to learn that their own preachers, if pressured, would admit they do not believe the Bible to be the inerrant word of God.
- D. Either the Bible is the inspired word of God, or else it is filled with false claims, and therefore not worthy of belief at all.
1. Paul wrote: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God . . ." (I Timothy 3:16).
  2. To the Thessalonians he wrote: "When ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God . . ." (I Thess. 2:13).
  3. Peter wrote: "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (I Peter 1:21).
  4. Paul cautioned the Corinthians: "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord." (I Cor. 14:37).
- E. But the church of Christ is not unique in emphasizing that the Bible is God's book.
1. The teaching of evolution and atheistic humanism are being opposed by conservative preachers? and church leaders in many denominations.
  2. The church of Christ is not unique in this sense. There are other religious groups who believe in the inspiration of the Bible.

## II. CHURCHES OF CHRIST ARE NOT UNIQUE IN RECOGNIZING THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE NEW TESTAMENT.

A. This distinction is emphasized in a number of passages:

1. The Old Testament prophet, Jeremiah, wrote: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah" (Jer. 31:31).
  - a. This Old Testament passage was quoted by one of the writers of the New Testament.
  - b. That writer was showing that the law of Moses had been abolished, and the new covenant the testament of Christ had come into force (Hebrews 8:6-13).
2. Colossians 2:14 says: "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross." This says Jesus abolished the Old Testament "handwriting of ordinances" when he died on the cross.
3. This being the case, Paul wrote that he was a minister of the new testament (11 Cor. 3:6). In the very next verse he refers to that which was written and engraven in stones as "the ministration of death." And in verse 11 he said it was "done away."
4. In Romans 13:9 it is affirmed that all the moral obligations of a man toward his fellow man, as implied in the ten commandments, are embraced in the words: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

- B. But the church of Christ is not unique in recognizing the distinction between the Old Testament and the New Testament.
1. Just consider the fact that most religious people in America who worship at all do so on Sunday, the first day of the week, rather than on the Old Testament sabbath, which would be Saturday.
  2. Notice also that most do not offer animal sacrifices, as were required by the Old Testament
  3. Therefore we are not unique in recognizing the distinction between the Old Testament and New Testament.

III. **THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IS NOT UNIQUE IN ITS REFUSAL TO USE MECHANICAL INSTRUMENTS OF MUSIC IN WORSHIP.**

- A. There is nothing inherently wrong with instrumental music. It is instrumental music in worship that we are talking about.
- B. It is true that our refusal to use instruments in our worship sets us apart from most in the religious world. Is there any real reason why churches of Christ do not use instruments in worship?
1. Every passage in the New Testament which refers to music in worship identifies that music as singing: Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26; Acts 16:25; Romans 15:9; I Corinthians 14:15; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12; James 5:13.
  2. We are warned not to go beyond the teaching of the New Testament (II John 9).
  3. Jesus taught that our worship must be in spirit and in truth. Worshiping in truth means worshiping according to the instruction in God's word. John 17:17 says: "Thy word is truth."

4. God accepted the worship of Abel and rejected the worship of Cain, because the worship of Abel was what God had authorized, and the worship of Cain was not what God had authorized.
  5. Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron, lost their lives for worshiping in a way not authorized by God.
  6. If we play instruments in our worship, we are worshiping in a way not authorized by God.
  7. Instruments of music in worship were not used for centuries after the church was established, and was opposed by most of the reformers, such as Luther and Calvin.
  8. The fact instruments were available to the early church, and had been used in Old Testament worship, and yet were not used by the early church suggests there must have been some good reason why they were not used.
  9. It is universally agreed that singing without the instrument is acceptable as worship. Why do otherwise?
- C. But a capella singing does not make the church of Christ unique.
1. The Greek Orthodox Church and some Primitive Baptist churches do not use the instrument in worship, and for the same reasons stated.
  2. Therefore we are not unique in refusing to use instrumental music

#### **IV. THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IS NOT UNIQUE IN ITS OBSERVANCE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER ON A WEEKLY BASIS.**

- A. It is true most religious groups eat the Lord's supper quite infrequently. Some eat it as often as monthly, I am told. Others quarterly, semi-annually, or annually.
- B. While religious people are not in agreement with reference to how frequently the supper should be eaten, Bible scholars are generally agreed upon the frequency with which it was eaten by Christians during the first century. In commenting on Acts 20:7, here are some of the remarks of the best known Bible commentators:
1. "... intimating by this, that they were accustomed to receive the holy sacrament on each Lord's day" (Adam Clarke, Methodist).
  2. This is also an important example of weekly communion as the practice of the first Christians" (A. C. Hervey, D. D., Church of England, in Pulpit Commentary).
  3. "It is probable that the apostles and early Christians celebrated the Lord's supper on every Lord's day" (Albert Barnes, Presbyterian).
- C. In Acts 20:7, the language the writer uses ("upon the first day of the week") with reference to the Lord's supper is identical to the language used in I Corinthians 16:2 with reference to the contribution ("upon the first day of the week"). Why is the contribution taken every week [and sometimes several times a week], but the Lord's supper observed only once in a great while?
- D. But the weekly observance of the Lord's supper does not make the church of Christ unique. Those who call themselves Independent Christian Churches eat the supper on a weekly basis, as do those churches which are identified as Disciples of Christ.

**V. CHURCHES OF CHRIST ARE NOT UNIQUE IN THEIR STAND ON BAPTISM.**

- A. In this also churches of Christ are set apart from many in the religious world, but not from all.
- B. Many practice infant baptism. The Bible teaches that those baptized must be:
1. Those who have heard and believed the gospel (Mark 16:15-16). Infants are not capable of believing.
  2. Those who have turned their hearts from sin in repentance (Acts 2:38). Infants have no sins for which to repent, and they have not the ability to repent.
  3. Those who have confessed their faith in Christ (Acts 8:37). Infants have no faith in Christ, and could not confess if they did.
  4. For these reasons infants are not subjects of Bible baptism.
- C. Many practice sprinkling or pouring and call it baptism.
1. Bible baptism is a burial in water (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12).
  2. The word baptize is translated from a Greek word which means to immerse.
  3. Pouring was first practiced by Pope Stephen II, and his action was ratified by the Council of Ravenna in 1311. Sprinkling came even later.
  4. Bible baptism is immersion in water.
- D. Many practice Baptism for the wrong purpose. They say it is merely an outward sign, or that one is baptized because he has already been saved, or that one is baptized to get into the church, or that baptism is essential to obedience but not to salvation.

According to the New Testament, baptism:

1. Saves (I Peter 3:21).
2. Washes away sins (Acts 22:16).\
3. Is for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

4. Puts one into Christ (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3).

E. But its Biblical stand on Baptism does not make the church of Christ unique.

1. For example, Baptist churches reject infant baptism and practice immersion.

2. Those who refer to themselves as Independent Christian Churches, and those who refer to themselves as Disciples of Christ practice baptism for the remission of sins.

3. So the church of Christ is not unique in it's understanding of Baptism.

VI. **OTHER AREAS IN WHICH CHURCHES OF CHRIST ARE DIFFERENT FROM MANY BUT NOT UNIQUE**

A. Congregational independence, with Christ the only head of the church (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22-23).

B. The use of Scriptural names, such as the name Christian to denote an individual member of the church, or church of God and church of Christ as designations for the church itself (Acts 11:26; Acts 20:28; Romans 16:16).

C. Emphasis on the Bible teaching concerning godliness, holiness, abstinence from the world (Romans 12:2; I Timothy 4:12; James 4:4; I John 2:15-17).

D. Stressing the importance of benevolent work to relieve human suffering and of evangelistic work to reach the lost with the gospel of Christ (Galatians 6:10; I Timothy 5:16; Acts 8:4; Mark 16:15).

E. All these are stressed in the church of Christ, but there are other churches which also stress all these. Stressing these things does not make the church of Christ unique.

VII. **IF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IS NOT UNIQUE IN ANY ONE OF THESE THINGS, THEN IS IT UNIQUE?**

- A. No one of these things discussed makes the church of Christ unique, but all of them together do.
- B. In other words, it is only in the church of Christ where people are found to be clinging to the Bible in all these different areas at the same time.
1. For example, Denomination A may hold to the truth on the inspiration of the Bible, but not on the distinction between the Old Testament and the New Testament.
  2. Denomination B may hold to the truth with reference to the distinction between the Old and New Testaments, but be in error on the subject of instrumental music in worship.
  3. Perhaps Denomination C rejects the use of instruments in worship, but does not eat the Lord's supper each Sunday.
- C. But in the churches of Christ, one can find people clinging tenaciously to the truth of God's word on all these subjects.
1. Where else would one find this?
  2. It is in this sense that the church of Christ is unique.

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| 1. Bible is Verbally Inspired         | 6. Congregational Independence |
| 2. Distinction between O.T. & N.T.    | 7. Scriptural Names            |
| 3. Refuse Instrumental Music          | 8. Emphasis on Godly Living    |
| 4. Weekly observance of Lord's Supper | 9. Importance of Benevolence   |
| 5. In their stand on Baptism          | 10. Emphasizing evangelism     |

## CONCLUSION

1. Is it not important for us to hold to all of the truth on every 'subject' ? The Psalmist wrote: "...Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way" (Psalms 119:128). Shouldn't that very attitude be ours?
2. There is at least one other thing that makes the church of Christ unique. It is unique in that it is the only institution on earth one becomes a member of by doing only what the Bible teaches one to do to become a Christian.
  - a. When one hears and believes the gospel (John 8:24), repents (Acts 17:30-31), confesses Christ (Matthew 10:32-33), and is baptized to have his sins forgiven (Acts 2:38), he is added by the Lord to the church (Acts 2:47).
  - b. Doing these things makes him a member of no other institution, but it does make him a member of the church of Christ.
3. The Church of Christ is unique in following only what the N.T. Teaches - but it follows all that is taught.
4. "If any man speak let him speak as the oracles of God;..." 1 Pet. 4:11
5. John 8:32 - truth - all of it - not just what we like - but all the truth

## Sources

1. Bobby Duncan's Sermons p. 305
2. Commentaries on verses

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Sermon by Arthur Pigman -  
Evans Church of Christ  
515 Gibbs Road  
Evans, Ga. 30809  
706-855-1249  
arthurpigman@cybrtyme.com