

SHORT HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY (2)

A person cannot talk about Jesus Christ without talking also about the church of Christ. Whereas Jesus is the Savior, His church is the Saved. What kind of people should these people be?

The church of Christ is a very important part of the history of Christianity. Most people respond to a statement like that by asking, which church? Does anyone really know how many different churches there are? And by “different churches”, I mean ... differences that really make a difference! You know what I mean, some differences make no difference at all! But fundamental differences make a big difference.

Take the foundation of a house for instance. You pour concrete into a hole that is dug in the shape of the house you have in mind. Does it make a difference whether you pour in six inches of concrete, or 18 inches? Oh yes! Now you may not tell the difference at first if you pour only 6 inches, but as the years go by you will defiantly see the difference! The house will begin to take an up-and-down look depending upon the softness or the hardness of the ground. In other words, the house will begin to take the shape of the ground rather than the shape the owner had in mind to begin with.

Things change over time. Humans change. Structures also change. Has the church of Christ changed through the centuries? What changes have been made and what effect has this had on people who believe in Jesus Christ? Are these changes what Jesus had in mind when He built His church?

Jesus said, “Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16:18.) Jesus is still building his church one person at a time upon the sure foundation that He is indeed the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus is the Anointed One. That’s what the word “Christ” means. That solid foundation has remained steadfast through the changing centuries.

In order for things to remain the same through time there must be a firm foundation upon which the structure is built. Any worker who works on maintaining and repairing a structure must honor the original foundation.

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Jesus' apostle Paul once said that it was "According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For **no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ**. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw-- each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. (1Co 3:10-17 ESV)

God's people are God's one temple. Jesus Christ is the church's perfect foundation. To the Ephesians the apostle Paul wrote that Jesus Christ came into the world to bring people together. That gathering place is the church of Christ. Jesus knew that he would not get **everyone** to lay down their hatred of others, their prejudices, their rivalries; but Jesus did know that **many** people would want peace, the peace that Jesus brings to the world. Paul wrote that Jesus came into the world that he "might reconcile us both (both Jews and Gentiles) in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility." Paul said that "in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. He himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility." (Eph. 2:14.) Well, how could Jesus break down a wall of hostility with his "flesh"? Paul is referring to the death of Jesus on the cross. When Jesus died on the cross, he died for sin. Hostility is sin! Hatred is sin!

The only thing that can break down hatred is forgiveness. That's right! Most hostility results from blaming the other person or persons for our unwanted circumstances. I can blame you, and hate you; and you can blame me and hate me, because of the situation that lies between us. Thus there is a wall of hostility between us.

But when we both realize that we are sinners before God and that we both will go to Hell because of our hatred; and when we both realize that we need God's forgiveness, then and only then can the wall of hostility come down. We realize that we are both lost before God. I am not better than you no matter what you

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have done; you are not better than me no matter what I have done. Our hatred will send us both to hell!

Wretched people that we are, who can save us? Jesus Christ has come to save us from our hatred and from **all** of our sins. And so, forgiven people [that is, people who have accepted and received God's forgiveness] can come together.

That is the meaning of the church of Christ; that is what the church of Christ is all about: people coming together, for worship and for work: These are People who acknowledge their need for forgiveness, People who will confess their sins, People who will confess their faith in Jesus Christ and be baptized into Him. When we both obey Jesus Christ by repenting of our sins and burying the man of sin in a watery grave, we then rise up out of the water as new creatures in Jesus Christ. According to Acts 2:47, Jesus Himself adds us to His church. I cannot vote on you. You cannot vote on me. I must accept you as a brother or sister in Christ if you have been raised from the watery grave. You must accept me as a brother in Christ.

Jesus "came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through [Jesus] we both have access in one Spirit to the Father." So then you and I are no longer strangers and aliens, but [we] are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. Should we still hate one another? God forbid! God's household, God's Temple, is God's church that is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the [chief] cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In [Jesus Christ, we] are being built together into a dwelling place for God [and how will he dwell in us?] by the Spirit." You can read this in Paul's full statement in Ephesians 2:13-22.

Friends, the church of Jesus Christ is a glorious entity. God is doing great work through the church of Christ. He is bringing people into peace. He is conquering hatred and division.

It is a sad condition, indeed, when we look at the divided state of those who believe in Jesus as the Christ! Is there not enough forgiveness among us to bring us together so that we can reason together? Isaiah said, "Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as

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white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.” (Isaiah 1:18.) You see, friends, it is **forgiveness** that must bring us together. But how we receive God’s forgiveness is a major difference between the people who believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. All believers in Christ believe that Jesus died for our sins, and that He was raised from the dead on the third day. And that remission of sins should be preached in his name among all men. But **when** do we receive this great salvation? At what point can it be said that I have become a Christian.

Friends, the scripture is very clear about this point. The Holy Spirit used the imagery of a burial and a resurrection to show us the dividing point between our sins and our salvation. Paul wrote in Romans 6:2, “How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. [For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness* of his resurrection (KJV)]: We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 6:2-11 ESV) What happened to that old dead body, it was buried in a watery grave and raised to newness of life. Yes, the Bible is clear that when we are baptized into Jesus Christ we are raised to begin the life of a Christian. At that point also we are added to the church of Christ by Jesus Himself. The Holy Spirit put it this way in 1 Corinthians 12:13, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, and were all made to drink of one Spirit.”

Have you been baptized into Jesus Christ and thus added to the church of Christ? Then we are brothers and sisters in Christ. Woe to the people who would try to divide us!