

The Bible versus the “Church of Christ”

What Is The Church?

Series Introduction:

1. This title refers to a tract, article, or book that is sometimes circulated.
2. It claims that its purpose is “to expose the false teachings of the so-called ‘Church of Christ.’”
3. Written by James L. Melton, this tract issues the following suggestion:
“If you attend a Church of Christ, or you know someone who does, I challenge you to read this study carefully, checking all of the scripture references in your Bible and praying for the Lord to show you the truth (Jn. 16:13). Remember, Jesus said SEEK and you shall FIND (Mt. 7:7).”
4. This series of lessons will seek to answer this challenge by comparing the allegations and accusations of this tract with the Word of God.
5. As Christians, we must “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15).
 - a. We must never be afraid of questions about our beliefs and practices.
 - b. We must not be distraught when someone challenges our beliefs and practices.
 - c. Instead, we must go to the Bible and show ourselves “approved unto God” by “rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).
6. It is important for us to know what others think and teach about us so we may be able to reason “with them out of the scriptures” (Acts 17:2).

Introduction:

1. One must not underestimate the value of the Lord’s church.
2. It is the “eternal purpose” of God, essential to man’s salvation (Ephesians 3:10-11; 5:23).
3. Yet, there is a fundamental misunderstanding of the church in much of the denominational world.
4. Thus, the first charge of false teaching has to do with this basic question: “What is the church?”
5. This lesson will consider the **nature** and the **name** of the church.

I. Is the Church a Spiritual Organism?

- A. **The Accusation:** *“The Church of Christ people fail to realize that the ‘true church’ is a spiritual organism, NOT a physical organization.”*
 1. It is claimed that the “one body” of Ephesians 4:4 is the spiritual body of Christ.
 2. That body is said to be made up of many different “religious groups” (denominations), each of them being labeled a physical church.
 3. In other words, the spiritual body of Christ is comprised the denominations, who do not believe and practice the same things.
- B. When we teach that the “one body” refers to the one church of Christ, they claim that we believe that “our denomination” is the only one that is right.
- C. **The Response:** *The true church is a spiritual body.*
 1. The Bible is clear that the church is not a physical building.
 - a. The church is able to hear and speak (Matthew 18:17; Acts 11:22).
 - b. The church is able to fear (Acts 5:11).
 - c. The church is able to suffer (Acts 8:1, 3).
 - d. The church is able to rest (Acts 9:31).
 - e. The church is able to pray (Acts 12:5).
 - f. The church is able to send and receive (Acts 15:3-4).
 - g. Obviously, none of these things are true of a physical building.
 2. The Bible is clear that the church is a body – in fact, the body of Christ.
 - a. The church has a head, Jesus (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:15-16; Col. 1:18; 2:19).
 - b. The church is a body, comprised of members (1 Corinthians 12).
 - c. There is only one head and only one body (Eph. 2:16; 4:4, 12; 5:23).

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3. The Bible is clear that the church is a spiritual body.
 - a. Jesus promised to build His church upon a spiritual rock (Matt. 16:16-19).
 - i. Peter’s confession was not revealed physically, but spiritually.
 - ii. The church was not built upon Peter (physical), but upon his confession (spiritual).
 - iii. Peter was not given physical keys, but spiritual words.
 - b. Jesus paid a spiritual price to purchase His church (Acts 20:28).
 - i. It was not purchased with silver and gold (1 Pet. 1:18-19).
 - ii. Though real, His blood was a spiritual offering (Heb. 9:12-14).
 - c. Jesus built His church on a spiritual foundation (Acts 4:11-12; Eph. 2:20).
 - d. In fact, Jesus declared that His church would be a spiritual kingdom (Matt. 4:17; 5:3; 11:11; Mark 9:1; Luke 17:20-21; John 3:3-5; 6:15; 18:36).
 - i. Of course, this was prophesied in the Old Testament (cf. Psalm 45:6-7; Isa. 9:6-7; Daniel 2:44; 7:14 [cf. Luke 19]; Zechariah 9:9).
 - ii. Interestingly, the author who condemns the church of Christ for teaching a “physical organization” believes that Jesus is coming back to establish a physical kingdom!
- D. However, this spiritual body is not made up of various denominational “churches.”
 1. The author believes that all “born-again believers” make up the “spiritual body.”
 - a. In this tract, he does not explain what it means to be a “born-again believer.”
 - b. Some teach that one is born again by accepting Jesus by faith as one’s personal Savior.
 - c. Others teach that one is born again by praying the “sinner’s prayer.”
 - d. Still others teach that one is saved by faith, then becomes “born again” by a working of the Holy Spirit.
 - e. One wonders if all of those who disagree about how to be born again are still a part of the “spiritual body” made up of “born-again believers.”
 2. Then, those “born-again believers” choose which “physical church” (denomination) to join.
 3. Thus, to the author, the spiritual body of Christ is comprised of all the various denominational groups – in spite of their differences of belief and practice.
 4. But, the Bible teaches differently.
 5. The Bible teaches that the body of Christ is made up of those who have been born again (John 3:1-16).
 - a. To be “born again” is to be “born of water and of the Spirit.”
 - b. This new birth occurs when one is baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (1 Peter 1:3, 22-25; Romans 6:3-4, 16-17).
 - i. The water is the water of baptism (Eph. 5:26; 1 Peter 3:20-21).
 - ii. The Spirit is the source of Truth, the Gospel (Eph. 6:17).
 - c. Everyone who has obeyed the Gospel (by hearing, faith, repentance, confession of faith, and baptism) is a member of the body of Christ.
 6. And, everyone who is born again is added by the Lord to the same body (Acts 2:37, 38, 41, 47).
 - a. Notice that salvation from sin and addition to the church are joined together and are both performed by the Lord.
 - b. That body is the one church, united in faith and practice (Eph. 4:4-6).
 7. The Bible does not teach that men can “join the church of their choice.”
 - a. When the Gospel was first preached, there were no other “churches.”
 - b. The spiritual body of Christ is the only body of Christ.

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- c. It is manifested in the world by local congregations, separated by location but united in Truth (Acts 14:23; 16:4-5; 1 Cor. 4:17; 7:17 14:33; 16:1).
 - 8. Furthermore, the Bible teaches that the body of Christ is made up of individual members, not denominations.
 - a. By the simple language of Scripture (Acts 2:47; 11:26; 12:1; 13:1; 14:27; 15:22; Romans 16:5, 23; etc.)
 - b. By the example of the vine and the branches (John 15:1-8)
 - 9. Finally, the Bible condemns denominationalism – division within the church.
 - a. Jesus prayed for unity (John 17:20-21; cf. 10:16).
 - b. The Apostles preached unity (1 Cor. 1:10-13; 11:18; 12:25; Rom. 16:17).
 - 10. The one, true church of Christ is not a denomination, nor is it comprised of denominations.
- E. **Conclusion:** *The Bible teaches that the church is a spiritual body, made up of individual members who hear, believe and obey the Gospel of Christ.*
 - 1. This body exists wherever and whenever men obey the simple teaching of the New Testament.
 - 2. When the seed of God’s Word is planted, the Lord’s church will be produced.