



Front Cover

RESTORING THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

Every church has its own peculiar plea. The peculiar plea of the church of Christ is for a complete restoration of the church which was established on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ in the city of Jerusalem (Acts 2). Everyone familiar with the New Testament knows that the twelve apostles were the charter members of the church and that three thousand souls were added to them at the close of the first sermon which was preached by Peter (Acts 2:14-47).

Not a Denomination

This church of which the apostles were charter members was not a denomination. What is a denomination? A denomination is a party, division, class, or sect. The dictionary defines a sect as a faction of dissenters who have pulled off from an established orthodox church, holding to a particular creed or practice.

If the church established by Christ and His apostles in Jerusalem on Pentecost were a denomination, I ask from what parent or orthodox church did they pull off? The church established there was the parent and orthodox church itself. Christ came into this world for the purpose of establishing His own church.

In Matthew 16:18, Jesus says, "...on this rock I will build My church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." He did not come into the world to simply pull off a group of dissenters from a church that had already been established.

Blood Purchased Church

Before Christ could establish His church, he had to die on the cross and shed His blood for it. Acts 20:28 says, "Shepherd the church of the living God, which He purchased with His own blood." Since Christ purchased this church with His own blood, it is His and He is the head of it. Paul, speaking of Christ in Ephesians 1:22-23, says, "...and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that fills all in all."

I do not know of anyone who claims that this church is denomination, and yet it existed on the earth in a visible form and was free from all man-made laws, denominational names, and machinery for some two or three hundred years. I also want to add that the growth of this undenominational church has never been paralleled in the history of men. Thousands upon thousands obeyed the gospel, as it was preached by the apostles and other inspired men, and were added by God to His church.

The church in Jerusalem grew to somewhere around 60,000 within a very few years. By the close of the first century, there were around one million members of this church in the Roman Empire. The church grew so rapidly that many became members that were only half converted. Some of the Pagans brought into the church with them many of their old Pagan ideas, and some of the Jews brought in with them many of the old Jewish ideas and customs. Thus, it was not long until the simplicity of the church as given to the world by Christ and His apostles, was lost because so many Jewish and Pagan customs and doctrines had been added.

The Falling Away

The apostle Paul freely predicted a falling away. In II Thessalonians 2:3, he said, "Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition."

Again, in I Timothy 4:1-3, we find these words: "Now the Spirit expressly says that in the latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth."

History reveals that this departure came as Paul said it would. The departure from the original pattern of things was gradual but continuous, until within a few hundred years there had developed the apostate church of Rome. This church so changed the name, doctrine, worship, and practice of the church that if a Christian who had lived in the days of the apostles had

been resurrected and attended the services and heard the teaching of the church, he would not have known what was going on! Gradually, this apostate church took the Bible out of the hands of the common people by allowing it to remain a dead language—Latin. Then the people were told that they could not understand the Bible. They were made to depend entirely upon their religious leaders for all of their religious instructions. This brought on what is known in church history as the dark ages. Such false doctrines as extreme unction, purgatory, transubstantiation, celibacy, and indulgences all came into existence during this period.

The doctrine of purgatory teaches that one who dies in sin can go on to heaven after suffering for awhile in purgatory. According to the theory, if a loved one will pay the priest a sufficient sum of money, he can, by his prayers, hasten the escape of the deceased from purgatory. The doctrine of indulgences teaches that one can, by the payment of a sum of money to the priest, get permission to indulge in sin without the Lord holding him responsible.

While Martin Luther was serving as a priest in Whittenberg, Germany, John Tetzel, a Dominican priest, came through that part of the country. He was raising money for the rebuilding of St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome by freely selling indulgences. Martin Luther rose up in holy protest against this corrupt practice. In fact, the church had drifted so far away from the original order of things that not only Martin Luther, but Zwingli, John Calvin, and others rose up and publicly protested its many corrupt practices.

Beginning of Denominationalism

These men had been members of the apostate church and by their protests had in mind to do nothing more than reform this church. Their efforts resulted in the founding of several Protestant denominations.

True to the definition of a denomination already given, these sects were groups of religious dissenters who had pulled off from an established church because of their objection to certain of its practices.

But these denominations held on to many doctrines and practices which were foreign to the church of which the apostles were members.

Finally, it began to dawn on some that the apostate church had gone too far from the truth to simply reform it. They could see that the efforts of the men just mentioned to reform the apostate church had only resulted in the founding of other unscriptural institutions known as denominations.

Church of Christ Restored

In the latter part of the eighteenth-century, a movement was launched in this country, America, by Abner Jones, James O'Kelley, and Barton W. Stone.

Later, it was ably championed by such men as Walter Scott, John Smith, and Thomas and Alexander Campbell to restore the apostolic church in its purity and simplicity.

Because of the zeal and success of the work of the Campbells, the bigoted and prejudiced enemies of this movement gave these Christians the stigma of Campbellites. But these Christians never accepted this name; they could not and be true to their plea. The plea of these men was: "We will go beyond denominationalism, and even the apostate church from which the denominations came. We will go back to the New Testament itself and restore the church as it was given to the world by Christ and His apostles."

They said, "We will do this by teaching everything they taught and refusing to teach anything which they did not teach. We will do and practice everything which they did and practiced, but we will not do one thing which they did not do and practice." This is what Peter tells us to do in I Peter 4:11, "If any one speaks, let him speak as the oracles [words] of God."

Now, this is the plea of the church of Christ today! We believe that this plea, if accepted and followed by all, will do away with the apostate church and all denominations and will restore the apostolic church in all its purity and simplicity. If not, why not?

If anyone living on earth today does what the apostles told sinners to do, and live as they directed Christians to live, nothing more and nothing less, it make of him what it made of them. If the Lord added them to His church then, He will add

such to His church today. And, if the Lord's church was not a denomination then, it will not be one today.

Did Campbell Found a Church?

When some hear what I have said, they say, "Then Alexander Campbell founded your church." No! No! Alexander Campbell did not found a church of his own. He, along with a group of great and good men already mentioned, restored the church which was founded by Jesus Christ and His apostles in Jerusalem in A.D. 33. If Campbell had taught a doctrine of his own called Campbellism, then those who followed his instructions would, of course, have been Campbellites

If I should teach a religious system of my own, my followers may justly be termed McClungites! But if I, or Campbell, or anyone else preach the same gospel that the apostles preached, those who hear, believe, and obey it will be Christians. The church of Christ does not propose to follow Campbell, but rather to follow Christ, for some of Campbell's ideas were not consistent with the ideas of Christ.

It is said that William Jennings Bryan held in his hand some wheat which was two thousand years old. It was taken from one of the tombs of Egypt. If this wheat had been planted, provided it retained its fertility, what would it have produced? Black eyed peas? Certainly not! It would have produced wheat, even if none like it had been planted or harvested during the intervening two thousand years. Seed always produces after its own kind.

Luke 8:11 says, "The seed is the Word of God." If the same word of God that Peter sowed on the day of Pentecost is sown in the heart of men and women today, it will make of men and women today what it made of them then.

A few years ago I conducted some meetings in Alabama. I ate some very fine watermelons while there. Suppose I had brought some of the seeds back to Texas and planted them. What would they have produced? Little McClungs? No! Watermelons. Why? Seed produces after its kind. Who carries or brings the seed to you does not have anything to do with what the

seed produces. Then, why argue that those who heard and obeyed the gospel preached by Mr. Campbell were Campbellites simply because he was the one who brought the gospel of Christ and His apostles to them.

We have a very popular game in this country called baseball. It is played according to certain rules and regulations. Let us suppose that people gradually lose interest in the game and quit playing it. But let us suppose that a thousand years from now, someone finds a baseball rule book. Would that be a new game, or the old game of baseball restored?

If we go to the New Testament, which was the rule book used by the apostles and early Christians in their religious activities, and follow it to the very letter, adding nothing and taking nothing from it, will we have a new church, or the church of the New Testament restored?

The Church Then and Now

Those of us who are members of the church of Christ claim that we are members of the same church that the apostles and early Christians were members of. We do not make this claim because we believe that we can trace a line of succession from the church here back through some other church and on back to the apostles.

Personally, I do not believe that any church can trace such a line of succession except through heretics.

We make this claim because we believe that we wear the same name, have the same organization, and teach and practice the same things they did. If we are not just what the church was in the days of the apostles, we promise you that we will do our utmost to become such as soon as we learn wherein we differ. What other church will make such a promise or offer such a plea?

The only way I know to determine whether the church of Christ today is the New Testament church restored is to study the New Testament church as described in the pages of the New Testament and compare it with the church of Christ today.

What Was the Creed of the Early Church?

The word creed comes from the Latin word *credo*, which means "I believe." A man's creed is what he believes. The early church believed that Jesus is the Son of God. This was its creed, its only creed. This was the creed which Peter confessed (Matthew 16:18).

This was the creed which the eunuch confessed before his baptism and becoming a member of the church. When the eunuch asked, "What hinders me from being baptized? Then Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God' " (Acts 8:36–37).

You will note that nothing else stood in the way of the eunuch's being baptized. Thus, the early church did not come together first and vote on those who had made application for membership. Since the New Testament is silent on voting on those who desire membership in the church, we remain silent there also. We ask people to subscribe to no confession of faith today other than that which Philip asked the eunuch to confess—that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

What Was the Discipline of the Early Church?

The early church followed the inspired teachings of Jesus and the apostles, which we now have in the New Testament. This is exactly what we use today. If we use more or less, we would lack just that much being the church of the New Testament. This is also why we confine ourselves to what they did in the matter of voting on new members and the confession we have people to make.

What Was the Organization of the New Testament Church?

A study of the organization of the church of which the apostles were members will reveal that Christ was the head of it. "And He is the head of the body, the church" (Colossians 1:18). He was its only head. It did not have a head on earth. The apostles were His ambassadors (II Corinthians 5:20).

As such, the apostles could speak with authority to all the congregations. Christ is still the only head of the church and the apostles are still exercising authority over the church through their inspired word which they left us in the form of the New Testament (Luke 22:30).

Each local congregation, when fully developed, had its own elders. Acts 14:23 says, "So when they had appointed elders in every church." These elders were also known as overseers, bishops, pastors, or shepherds (Acts 20:28; I Peter 5:1-4). They governed the church along with the assistance of the deacons.

That each church had its own bishops and deacons can be seen from reading Philippians 1:1: "To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons." Each congregation as separate from every other church or group of churches, subject to no authority outside the local congregation, other than Jesus Christ and the apostles. This is the exact organization which churches of Christ have today.

Nowhere in the New Testament do you read of the pope or the president of the church. Neither can you read of the archbishop, cardinal, or of the general assembly, the convention, the conference, or the presiding elder. The church of the New Testament was completely free from all the denominational machinery, and ecclesiastical systems which can be seen all about us today.

It is true that the churches of New Testament times supported evangelists or preachers, but there is nothing to indicate that they exercised control over the churches as pastors, or as a clergy. They were a teaching and not a ruling class (II Timothy 4:2).

The New Testament is also silent on such expressions as Reverend, Father, Rector, or clergy as applied to preachers. This is no accident. Neither is it because we just want to be different. It is a part of our determination to "speak where the Bible speaks and to be silent where it is silent."

If we should use any of the above mentioned expressions to designate our preachers, we would lack just that much being the church of the New Testament.

What Name Did the Early Church Wear?

One of the names it wore was church of Christ. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus said, "I will build My church." If I should build me a house, I would speak of it as my house. If you were speaking of it, you would say that it is Paul McClung's house. In like manner, Christ says, My church. But when we refer to this institution, we speak of it as Christ's church, or the church of Christ.

In Romans 16:16, Paul, writing to the church in Rome and sending salutations from the churches around him, said, "The churches of Christ salute you." In Hebrews 12:23, the church is called the church of the firstborn. Jesus was the firstborn from the dead (Colossians 1:18). Therefore, the church of Christ is the church of the firstborn.

In I Corinthians 11:22, the church is spoken of as the church of God. Again, in Acts 20:28, it is called the church of God. But, from John 17:10, we learn that what belongs to God belongs to Christ and whatever belongs to Christ belongs to God. Christ says, "All Mine are Yours and Yours are Mine." So, it does not make any difference whether we call it the church of God or the church of Christ. Many times in the New Testament it is just called the church. But if ownership is shown, it is either of Christ or God.

The names worn by all churches have their significance. They either point to some person who originated them, or to some peculiarity of the group. The name Roman points to Rome, Lutheran to Luther, Presbyterian to a form of church government, and Baptist to the practice of immersion. A church intending to restore New Testament practices would certainly have to avoid the use of such names. All of these names had their origin several centuries after the death of the apostles.

Of What Did the Worship of the New Testament Church Consist?

The public worship consisted of observing the Lord's Supper, contributing of their money, singing, teaching the Word of God, and praying. Weekly observance of the Lord's Supper was a part of the worship of the early church.

Acts 20:7 says, "Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them."

This shows that the weekly observance of the Lord's Supper was a regular practice of theirs. This will help you understand the admonition in Hebrews 10:25, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."

Most all churches cite these passages to justify the weekly assembly of its members for worship. If they authorize the weekly assembly, they also authorize the weekly observance of the Lord's Supper. Others may observe the Lord's Supper at Lent, once a year, quarterly, or monthly. But the church of Christ will observe it weekly. We are determined to follow the example left us by the early Christians.

How did the early church raise money for the carrying on of its work? I Corinthians 16:2 says, "On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come." Nowhere do we find an apostle telling them that the law of tithing was binding; many gave far more than a tenth. Each gave as he was prospered, as he himself purposed in his heart (II Corinthians 9:7).

Nowhere do we read of the early church taxing each member so much. Neither do we read of the early church staging pie suppers, rummage sales, or parties of any kind to raise money for the church. Community begging was not engaged in. Many have been gratified to find in the churches of Christ today the New Testament pattern of church finances restored.

In the worship of the churches of Christ today, you will find many prayers offered, just as they were in New Testament times (I Timothy 2:8).

You will also find in our worship singing just as they sang then. A careful study of the New Testament will reveal that the singing of the early church was a cappella—that is, it was not accompanied by any mechanical instrument.

Paul, in giving instruction to the early church, said, "Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:19). Their singing was "the fruit of our lips" and made a sacrifice that was well pleasing to the Lord (Hebrews 13:15).

If we are loyal to our plea, we will use nothing but vocal music in our worship, knowing what the early church did in the matter of making music in their worship, "We speak where the Bible speaks and are silent where the Bible is silent."

If we should use a mechanical instrument we would be "going on and abiding not in the doctrine of Christ." In II John 9, we find these words, "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son." Any church that uses a mechanical instrument in its worship lacks just that much being what the New Testament church was.

What Was the Teaching of the Early Church as to How to Become a Christian?

On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God. He called upon the men of Israel to know assuredly, that God has made the Jesus whom they had crucified both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). Here he was calling for strong faith. We know that these people did believe that He was the Christ, for verse 37 says, "Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' "

Even though these people believed in Jesus, they were not saved. At least they did not think so. Neither did Peter, for in answer to their question, he said, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38).

From this we learn that the apostles of the early church taught men to believe, repent, and be baptized in order that they might be saved. This is exactly what churches of Christ teach today. Any church that

teaches a plan of salvation that differs from this lacks just that much being the New Testament church.

11

Since the church of Christ today teaches the same things the apostles taught, since it worships in the same way, has the same organization, wears the same names and has the same creed, we believe that we are the New Testament church, and not just a denomination. Can this be said of the church of which you are a member?

12

NOT TO BE SOLD

A free Bible Correspondence Course
Is Available from:
WORLD BIBLE SCHOOL
P.O. BOX 2169
Cedar Park, Texas 78630-2169

For further study of the Bible,
information about the Scriptures or a
place to worship, please contact the
Church of Christ nearest you.

MISSION PRINTING, INC.
World Evangelism by the Printed Page
A Work of Churches of Christ
P.O. Box 2029
Arlington, Texas 76004-2029

Back Cover