

### **What's the Difference?**

November 30, 2014

Is one Church just as good as another? If you answered yes, how do you know? Did you know there are twenty-one thousand to forty-three thousand Christian denominations in the world (<https://theway21stcentury.wordpress.com/2012/11/23/how-many-christian-denominations-worldwide/>)? Since Christ said, "I will build MY church" (Mt 16:18), there must be only one, and that's the one we all should want to find. Paul said there was "one body" (Eph 4:4), but is that the same thing as the church? Speaking of Christ, Paul also said, "And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence" (Col. 1:18). Knowing for certain that the body and the church are the same, and that there is only one, we must go about finding it. How do we know that the church of Christ (Rom. 16:16) is the New Testament church?

The first thing we want to notice is that the church of Christ is organized in the way that the New Testament commands. Unlike the denominations of the world teach, one cannot join the New Testament Church, because one must be "added" to it by God (Acts 2:47). Following the commandments of the New Testament, we find that there are certain steps we need to follow in order to be added to the church. First of all, Paul said we are called by the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14). He also said that the gospel was the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16) and that the Gospel produces faith once it is heard and studied (Rom. 10:17). Unlike man-made religions, the New Testament church does not teach a faith-only religion, because James said, "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only" (Js. 2:24). Therefore, there must be other steps apart from just having faith that Jesus is the Son of God. On the day of Pentecost, Peter commanded those in attendance to "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). After demonstrating his belief and repentance, the Ethiopian Eunuch asked what prevented him from being baptized. Philip answered, "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest." Then the Eunuch answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:37). After one makes the great confession, Paul said that it placed them "unto salvation" (Rom. 10:10), so there must be a final step into salvation.

One of the greatest examples of obedience is Saul of Tarsus. When Christ appeared to Him on the road to Damascus, he believed and confessed that Jesus was Lord (Acts 9:6), and his repentance was shown by his fasting and praying (Acts 9:9, 11), but he was not saved. We know that because after Ananias taught him the gospel, he asked Saul, "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). Putting all these steps together, we have hearing the gospel, believing in it (Hebrews 11:6), repenting of past sins (Acts 3:19), confessing that Jesus is the Son of God (Mt. 10:32), and being immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins (Mk. 16:16), which also puts us into the body of Christ (Gal 3:26-27). These five scriptural steps of initial salvation show us that the denominational concept of salvation by faith alone is false, because the sinner's prayer is not taught in the Bible. John even recorded, "Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him" (Jn. 9:31).

Another distinction between the NT church and manmade religions is that it teaches that once you are saved you can lose your salvation. In his letter to the Christians in Galatia (Gal 1:2), Paul warned them that if they left the church, they would fall from grace (Gal 5:4). From this we learn that one must be faithful throughout this life. Jesus said, **"And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who**

**endures to the end will be saved**” (Mt. 10:22). Paul described his faithfulness when he said, “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

The third difference between the NT church and the world’s denominations is that the Church of Christ worships differently. Notice the five acts of worship that have been commanded in the NT. The example of the first century Christians is that they met upon the first day of the week to observe certain acts that could only be done on that day. There are two acts that we observe only on Sunday: observing the Lord’s Supper (Acts 20:7), and giving as we have been prospered (1 Cor. 16:1-2). However, there are other acts of worship that we have been commanded to observe, such as singing (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19). Within those verses, we are told that our offering of musical praise is to be done by singing, and the Hebrews writer said that our sacrifice of praise was to be the fruit of our lips (Heb. 13:15). The New Testament example is that we also preach from the word of God and pray to the Father through Jesus Christ as acts of worship.

Yet another difference between the church of Christ and many man-made religions is that we observe the commandment that men take the lead in worship. Paul commanded that the sisters of the Lord’s church cannot take positions of authority in the church (1 Tim 2:12; 1 Cor. 14:34), which shows that God has ordained the male members to have the lead in the activities of the church.

After considering these things, it becomes clear that the New Testament church is different. Since the church is different, its members are to be different, as well (Rom. 12:2; 1 Peter 2:9).

*Note from Rick:*

*Our young people, that participate in the Monthly Youth Challenge, wrote this article with a little help from me. Take the time to tell them how well they did and to encourage them to continue in their efforts. Those that met to work on the article were Barrett Price, Grayden Price, Declan Price, Taylor Owens, Alexandria Owens, Camrin Owens, and Blaiklyn Owens.*