

The Church of Christ

Nashville can be a confusing area to those with a denominational mindset.

For example, think of the number of churches in the area that call themselves “churches of Christ”. To the casual observer, these may appear to be branches of the same denomination. Based on this premise, many have summarized beliefs by:

- You think you are the only ones going to heaven.
- You don't believe in music.
- All they know is Acts 2:38.

Even among “churches of Christ” there are descriptive categories:

- Non-Institutional (NI)
- “Anti”
- Liberal
- Conservative
- Main Stream

Can even sub-divide further among “NI” churches:

- Marriage, Divorce, & Re-marriage
- Day-Age Application of Genesis 1
- Rom. 14
- Churches that seem to align with “brotherhood magazines”

On top of that, there are also various organized lectures, websites, publications, and Florida College that are associated with NI churches in the minds of some.

Again, to the casual observer, this may look like a denominational system. Perhaps, we can even get caught up in thinking in the same terms, even though we would not normally be willing to call it a denomination.

Consequently, it is worth thinking about what a denomination is. One of the definitions given in the American Heritage Dictionary is “a class of units”. In the religious world, this definition translates into divisions of “Christianity”. Other things commonly associated with denominationalism are:

1. earthly name (title)
2. earthly organization (a hierarchy; church is made up of local congregations)
3. In many cases, an official creed

What do “we” do sometimes?

- Various doctrines under “church of Christ”
- No differentiation as long as title is there
- OR differentiation/identification according to sub-titles (NI, MDR teachings, Rom 14, etc.)
- Creed is not official, but in effect, is based on brotherhood papers, books, college lectures, gospel meeting preachers' opinions, etc., rather than the Bible (i.e., based on tradition of the churches of Christ rather than God's word)

If we are guilty of these, it needs to be asked if we really understand what the church is.

The first step in not thinking in a denominational fashion is to understand the meaning of the word “church” as used in the New Testament. From ἐκκλησία (ekklesia), many of us have been taught “called out” as the meaning; however, we would do well to think in terms of assembly, congregation, or group of people because that is the common usage of the word in New Testament times. In fact, this was a common word and not a word reserved for just religious gatherings.

Examples of ‘Ekklesia’ Usage:

1. Acts 7:38 – translated congregation (the congregation of Israel)
2. Acts 19:32 – translated assembly (a riotous mob in this instance)
3. Acts 19:39 – translated assembly (reference to the lawful assembly as in a court appearance)
4. Acts 19:41 – translated assembly (the now quieted mob)
5. Mt. 16:18 – translated church (Christ’s people or Christ’s body of the saved; often used this way in the New Testament)

3 Examples of why it will help if we think of the church as God’s assembly of saved people:

1. “You think the church of Christ are the only ones who will be saved” (many do not really disagree with such a statement; they just do not understand what the Bible means by church (this is like asking if the saved are the ones who will be saved – the answer is obvious).
2. I Cor. 14:34-35 – when does this instruction apply? When assembled!
3. I Tim. 5:16 – Is the individual Christian the same as the church? The verse says there are responsibilities that should fall upon individuals that should not fall upon the assembly as a whole.

Ekklesia – 2 usages in the N.T.

1. Heb. 12:23 – those whose names are registered in heaven; the assembly is in heaven (in a figurative sense while we are on earth). This is the usage of the word in Acts 2:47, it is what is referenced in I Pet. 2:5-9, and this is the one body or the one church as taught in Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4. Sometimes called the universal church.
2. I Cor. 1:1-2; Rom. 16:16; I Cor. 16:19; Rom. 16:5 (see Heb 10:24-25); because Christians in a geographic location have responsibilities to provoke one another unto love and good works, they work together in a local sense; in this sense, there can be multiple churches; however, these are not local congregations that work with other local congregations to make up the universal church. The universal church is made up of all the saved Christians, NOT all of the local congregations (the latter is a denominational organization).

What makes a local church right?

1. A scriptural name, although important, does not make a church right.
2. Adherence to the word of God in a collective sense and as individuals is what makes a church one that belongs to Christ.

What about the name?

- Remember, one aspect of denominationalism is to require official titles when God has not specified.
- It is worth asking, “what was established on Pentecost (in Acts 2)?” Not the “church of Christ as a title (in fact, the Bible uses other terms to describe His church as well); Acts 2 is when God’s plan to save mankind was put into full effect, resulting in those who were being saved being added to God’s whole body of the saved.
- When we claim not to be a denomination, it is not because our system has the right name, but because we individually have been added to God’s body of the saved and we are working in a local sense with others who have done the same. Beware, we can turn the “church of Christ” into the very denomination we claim not to be a part of by acting and thinking in a denominational manner.

Christ’s church is not a denomination:

1. No official earthly title
2. No earthly headquarters
3. No Creed
4. Is not an earthly institution or earthly organization
5. Is NOT composed of all the local congregations, but rather all the saved
6. In a local sense, autonomous churches have organization to help do the work (Phi. 1:1; I Pet. 5:2)
7. Christ’s church is simply His saved people, based on individuals first having a relationship with God (universal) and then, with other individual Christians based on geography (local)

If we cannot understand this, who will?

There is a great need for understanding:

1. Many in the world are tired of organized religion
2. Many would like forgiveness of sins that only comes in Christ Jesus
3. Many would like to be a part of God’s body of the saved, whose names are registered in heaven
4. Many would like to work with a simple group of Christians who are not part of a hierarchy, but instead are trying to locally provoke one another to love and good works, and ultimately, get to heaven

Interested?