

Church of Christ in the 21st Century – Lesson 3

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- Most people who are uneducated in the details of the Lord's church will say that the Church of Christ is just another denomination
- We all know that that could not be further from the truth
- To denominate means to divide
 - If you think of a fraction, the top number is the numerator
 - The bottom number is the denominator
 - Why?
 - Because the bottom number divides the top number
 - And the result is the numerical value of the fraction in decimal form
 - $\frac{1}{2}$ becomes 0.50, $\frac{1}{4}$ becomes 0.25, etc.
 - The root word of denominator is obviously denominate and just as in fractions, to denominate is to divide
- 1 Corinthians 1 clearly forbids division of any sort
 - Vs 12-15 – *“Now I say this, that each of you says, ‘I am of Paul,’ or ‘I am of Apollos,’ or ‘I am of Cephas,’ or ‘I am of Christ.’ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name.”*
 - The gospel is not the gospel because of what we did, rather it is the gospel because of what Christ did
 - It is the gospel of Christ (Romans 1:16), not the gospel of anyone else or anything else
 - When the world glorifies these other men or events (Biblical or non-Biblical) in the names of their congregations, when they don't serve the way that God instructs us to serve, worship, etc. – they are dividing Christ
 - And in the church of Christ – we are clearly glorifying Christ in the name of the congregation and we are clearly showing who owns it
 - Now what goes on inside the congregation must be evaluated as well, but at least if the congregation puts the proper ownership on what they call themselves (Christians – followers of Christ, members of Christ's church) – then that would at least get me in the door
 - Now again, whether I stay or not to worship is a different question that I'll be constantly evaluating
 - John 3:30 – *“He must increase, but I must decrease.”*
 - It's Christ's church (Matthew 16:18), not the church of any other man or thing, and we must respect that
- This is our 3rd lesson in our study of the Church of Christ in the 21st century
- In our first lesson, we discussed what I would call foundational information about the church
 - That Christ is the King, He's the head of the church, He's the groom of the church (Ephesians 1:22-23 & Ephesians 5:22-23)
 - And how the church is His body, His kingdom, His bride (again, Ephesians 1:22-23 & Ephesians 5:22-23)

- And how Christ established His church on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 and how it still stands today, tomorrow, and forever (Daniel 2:44)
- In our last lesson, we discussed how we as members of Christ's kingdom are to be servants
 - Christ came to serve, not to be served and He is our example (Matthew 20:28 & 1 Peter 2:21)
 - So therefore, we must be servants as well
 - And even after we've done everything that we were instructed to do, we're still unworthy of any reward (Luke 17:10)
 - We discussed how God owes us nothing, rather we owe God everything – we must submit our lives to Him (Romans 12:1-2)
 - We talked about the servitude of Jesus in Philippians 2 and how He washed His followers feet in John 13, and just like Jesus had the servant mindset, we must have that as well
 - Finally, we discussed how we are to serve in a peaceful kingdom, a compassionate kingdom, and a transcendent kingdom
 - And that every day we are on this earth, we are to be the best servants of Christ's that we can possibly be
- Galatians 1:6-10
 - The region of Galatia is located within the borders of present day Turkey
 - It was in the Asia Minor area
 - The Southern portion of it would include Perga, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe – all locations that Paul traveled to during his first missionary journey in Acts 13-14
 - If you remember, the Jews in those locations ran Paul and Barnabas out pretty much everywhere they went and a few of them despised their message so much that they followed them into Lystra and stoned Paul (Acts 14:19)
 - They thought that he was dead
 - But he wasn't – went to Derbe the next day (Acts 14:20)
 - Regardless, these churches were established during that first missionary journey of Acts 13-14, on their way home Paul and Barnabas strengthened these churches (Acts 14:21-28)
 - At the start of his second missionary journey, taken with Silas this time – Paul strengthened the churches again (Acts 15:41 & Acts 16:6)
 - And he went through this region again on his 3rd missionary journey in Acts 18:23
 - At some point during all of this, Paul writes this letter to the Galatian churches
 - I'm not sure if this was after his 1st journey or his 2nd journey (My gut tells me that it wasn't as late as after his 3rd because he doesn't mention anything about his imprisonment)
 - He does mention that he's taken some beatings up to this point, because in Galatians 6:17, he says that he bears on his body the marks of Jesus
 - So, regardless – between his most recent trip to these churches and the time he writes this letter, they've allowed some false teaching to creep in
 - And we know from reading the rest of the book of Galatians, it revolved around bringing back some principles of the old law, specifically the practice of circumcision
 - To this, Paul starts the letter with *"I marvel that you are turning away so soon..."* (vs 1)

- Evidently, it did not take very long before this false teaching started creeping into the Lord's church
- I think we can all agree that we've got to watch for this in the 21st century just as much as they had to watch for this back then
- The world is constantly trying to paint the picture that acceptance of everyone for how they want to behave is love
- But the truth is that God is love (1 John 4:8)
- And we've got to stand up for what is right – God and His teachings
- Even when the rest of the world doesn't
- Hate the sin, but love the sinner and try to bring him/her to the fold
- Paul calls this a different gospel, one that is truly not another
 - So if this different gospel is not another – then there must be but 1 true gospel
 - And that gospel is the gospel of Christ
 - And if we're teaching anything different, then we're perverting the gospel of Christ (vs 7)
 - And if we're teaching in any other name, then we are dividing Christ which is also forbidden (1 Corinthians 1)
- And then Paul makes an interesting statement in vs 8-9
 - If Paul himself and/or the brethren with him or even an angel from heaven – teach you some different gospel, let me or him be accursed
 - A statement so powerful that Paul repeats himself in vs 9
 - There's not a whole lot of things that are said back to back like this in the Bible, so the fact that Paul does it here should tell us how important and how imperative this idea is
 - There's but 1 gospel – and we must keep it pure, we must learn it, understand it for what it truly is and not teach anything else
 - Joshua 1:7 – *“Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go.”*
 - Revelation 22:18-19 – *“For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”*
 - We aren't to deviate from the word to the right or to the left, lest we be punished – according to Galatians, we'd be perverting the gospel of Christ, according to 1 Corinthians 1 – we'd be dividing Christ
 - In speaking of some of Paul's writings, Peter states in 2 Peter 3:16 – *“as also in all his epistles, speaking8 in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.”*
 - We can see the criticality of staying true to the 1 true gospel and not perverting in any way as doing so would be to our own destruction
 - This is what **untaught** and **unstable** people do

- So, 1 – we need to be teaching people the correct principles of the gospel
 - And 2 – once we’ve learned the correct principles of the gospel, we must be obedient and faithful, else we’d be unstable (James 1:6 tells us something similar as well)
- And Paul concludes this section of Galatians 1 (vs 10) with the fact that he is trying to please God, not man – and of course, we should be doing that as well
- So there is but 1 gospel, and that’s what we must be teaching – exactly how God intended us to do
- This is what will please God, not the teachings of man (Matthew 15:8-9)
- 1 Timothy 1:3-7
 - Paul calls Timothy a true son in the faith (vs 2)
 - Paul met Timothy in either Derbe or Lystra – both are mentioned in Acts 16
 - And Timothy was a believer and well spoken of (Acts 16:1-2)
 - And Paul gave him the gift of God via the laying on of his hands according to 2 Timothy 1:6
 - And here in 1 Timothy 1:3, Paul is entrusting Timothy with the responsibility of charging others to teach no other doctrine
 - The passages that we just discussed prove that there truly is no other doctrine
 - And 1 Timothy again repeats for us that there is no room for false doctrine in the Lord’s church
 - Timothy was entrusted to make sure that nothing unscriptural was being taught in Ephesus
 - Again, we must do this as well
 - 2 Timothy 2:15 – *“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”*
 - To be approved of God, we must rightly divide the word of truth
 - Anything else is fables & endless genealogies (1 Timothy 1:4)
 - If we are teaching something that cannot be found within the written word, we are teaching fables
 - Belief only salvation, once saved always saved, the sinner’s prayer – they’re all fables
 - They’re not found within the written word
 - And they will not be accepted by God as they are fables taught by men (Matthew 15:8-9)
 - Notice the reasoning that Paul gives Timothy as the basis for this instruction
 - *“Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith.”*
 - Paul says here that teaching the one true doctrine is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith
 - If we know our friends in the world are not walking the straight and narrow and we teach them, we show that we love them
 - And if we don’t teach them, maybe we don’t have the love for them that we should have

- They may reject your teaching, but at least you won't be able to say you didn't try to the best of your ability
 - Paul goes on to further say that this false teaching is idle talk and those who teach it really don't understand the things which they affirm (vs 7)
 - For those who are not part of the Lord's church and they think they have Scriptural reason for being a part of whatever "church" they are apart of – there's always holes in their logic (the thief on the cross is a big one for example)
 - You just have to find it, study with them
 - The only sound, pure, unadulterated logic is to submit your lives to Christ (Romans 12:1-2) in the way that was intended by Him (Matthew 15:8-9)
 - Let them talk as well as brother Rob Whitacre taught us – be a good listener because these folks are lost if they're not part of the 1 true church
 - We need to acknowledge that, have the love for our fellow man that makes us want to lead them to Christ, and try to bring them to the fold
 - But if we constantly talk over them, beat them over the head with the Bible so to speak, how can we expect them to listen to us when we speak the 1 true gospel to them
 - Paul said he had clear conscience (Acts 23:1) – how could he possibly say this? He was on trial.
 - Ezekiel 3:17-19
 - Though this is an OT passage, I think we can all agree that the principles taught here are still applicable today
 - Ezekiel was made a watchman for Israel
 - He was told to give Israel a warning
 - God says when I give you a message to deliver and you don't deliver it – the intended recipients of the message will die in their sins and their blood will be on your hands
 - But if you deliver the message, you will have saved your soul even if they don't heed the warning
 - Paul did this, and as a result – his conscience was clear
 - He went to Jerusalem even when he received a message through Agabus from the Holy Spirit saying that he was going to be bound (Acts 21:10-14)
 - We must do the same – we must teach people that there is but 1 church and then we can have a clear conscience
- As we've discussed this lesson and in previous lessons, Christ established His church – His 1 and only church (Matthew 16:18)
- With this in mind, let's read **John 17:20-23**
 - From study of the Scriptures we know that the church was scattered in Acts 8 (starting in vs 4)
 - The church that Christ established on Pentecost in Acts 2, was now being persecuted and scattered
 - And we know that persecution is certainly not ideal
 - But in this case, God used this to spread the gospel message to the world
 - And Jesus is thinking about these members of His church in John 17

- In vs 20, Christ says “Not only do I pray for my current followers, but also for those who will follow me through their word”
- In other words – the people who my current followers convert to My church – please be with them that they may be one
- There cannot be unity if Christ established more than 1 church
- Christ is the head of the church – not Paul, not Peter, not Apollos (1 Corinthians 1)
- Ephesians 4:1-16
 - In order for there to be unity of the Spirit, there must be...
 - 1 body, 1 Spirit, 1 hope, 1 Lord, 1 faith, 1 baptism, 1 God, 1 Father, 1 church which is His body
 - There is one of all of this
 - We cannot be tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine (vs 14)
 - Because we know that *“Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper.”* (Psalm 1:1-3)
 - Rather than being tossed around by the winds of false doctrine, we are to be firmly rooted like a tree planted by the rivers of water – and as we sing, we shall not be moved
- The Scripture does not allow for multiple interpretations of the Scriptures, thus leading to multiple denominations – this would be winds of false doctrine as described in Ephesians 4 (fables as described by 1 Timothy 1)
- Think of it this way
 - The church is the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5 & 2 Corinthians 11:2, amongst many others)
 - The church – 1 church – 1 bride
 - Physical adultery is forbidden (Matthew 5:27-30)
 - If denomination A says we are the church, and denomination B says we are the church, and denomination C says we’re all the church – does that not give Christ multiple brides?
 - This cannot be – adultery is forbidden
 - But some may say this is physical adultery
 - **Jeremiah 3:6-11**
 - Israel – the nation who had not even 1 righteous king, committed adultery (vs 8)
 - Both Judah and Israel were guilty of spiritual harlotry
 - Not physical (although I’m sure that went on), but God is talking spiritual here
 - He says they committed adultery with stones and trees (referring to their idols of course) – vs 9
 - Spiritual adultery is no different

- To say that there are numerous churches is to make an adulterer of Christ
 - And we all know that cannot be correct
 - Christ prayed for unity
 - The church must be united – and we do so by the word of God
 - We must all stay true to the word and not interject the teachings of man (Matthew 15:8-9)
- Now, think of your physical body for a moment
- It is 1 body – but it has many parts
- As does the Lord’s church
- 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 discusses this
 - Vs 12 – *“For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.”*
 - Now, we were all baptized into one body (vs 13) – but we each have our own talents
 - Some preach, some lead public prayers, some serve on the Lord’s Supper table, some mow the grass, some cook excellent meals, some are great at teaching children, some are great encouragers, etc.
 - As humans, sometimes we can get lost in the here and now (just as Mary and Martha did with Jesus in Luke 10 and John 11)
 - And we think preaching is more important than mowing the grass for instance
 - Or leading public prayers is more important than the person who vacuumed
 - This is not true according to 1 Corinthians 12
 - Vs 15-16
 - If the foot feels more important than the hand, the foot cannot say that it is not a part of the body
 - I know personally, if I had to lose an extremity – I’d rather lose my hand than my foot
 - But the foot cannot feel as if it is more important and as a result say “I’m not apart of this – I’m too important, much more so than the hand”
 - Similarly, if the ear feels less important than the eye for instance – it cannot say “I’m not an eye, therefore I’m not a part of the body”
 - Both of these are ridiculous
 - We all have our talents and they are all critical
 - As a member of the Lord’s church – I need you, and you need me
 - We are encouraged by one another
 - 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.”*
 - We can’t miss the assembly because doing so would deprive your brethren of the opportunity for encouragement
 - It doesn’t matter what your talent is (how big or how small you may think it is) – we need you
 - God calls us to use our talents – so use yours (Matthew 25), glorify God so that others may see your good works and praise our heavenly Father (Matthew 5:16)

- Last major talking point I want to bring up: though there is one body, there are obviously multiple congregations of the same body
 - These multiple congregations of course are all in unity of the Spirit via the words of the Bible
 - We all follow the Bible as God intended, therefore we are all in unity
 - Romans 16:16 – *“Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you.”*
 - Does this mean that there are multiple denominations all worshipping in the name of Christ?
 - Based on what we’ve discussed this lesson, certainly not
 - Rather, there are multiple congregations of the 1 true church
 - Titus 1:5 – *“For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you – “*
 - Acts 14:23 – *“So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”*
 - Paul instructed Titus to appoint elders in every city, and Paul & Barnabas appointed elders in every church
 - Does this mean there are multiple denominations?
 - Again, of course not – this means that there is but 1 church separated by physicality only
 - The congregation at West Side is the same as the congregation at Lake Drive which is the same as the congregation in Fort Chiswell, etc.
 - In the fact that if we follow the Bible, if we serve and worship as God intended – then we are all united though separated by distance only
- In conclusion of this lesson, I think that we are all aware of the fact that one of the greatest (if not the greatest) hindrance to the church’s attempt to bring the lost to Christ is all of the false doctrine that is out there
 - All of the denominations that claim to be of Christ but are not
 - There is only one body (Ephesians 4:4)
 - The Lord reigns as King of Kings over 1 kingdom – a united kingdom
 - There are not different types of Christians, but only Christians (1 Corinthians 1:10-15)
- I hope that through the Scriptures we’ve examined this evening that you are convinced of that
- And I challenge all of us including myself to do our best to evangelize the denominational world and to study to make sure that we are in alignment with God’s word