

# CHURCHES OF CHRIST

WHO ARE THEY



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# **SEARCH PROGRAMS**

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**Topics subject to change without notice**

## **JUNE 4 - CHURCHES OF CHRIST, WHO ARE WE?**

If you were watching CNN Headline News on 3/27/06 you saw an attempt to malign churches of Christ on the "Nancy Grace" segment of the CNN news. Our programs for the month of June will be a response, not to that Baptist preacher, but to the very obvious need of establishing our true identity in the religious community.

## **JUNE 11 - WHO BEGAN THE CHURCH OF CHRIST AND WHEN?**

Was it Alexander Campbell 150 years ago? Was it Jesus Christ? If so, when? What proof do we have? Is it possible to be a church of Christ in the 21st Century? How does a church become a church of Christ?

## **JUNE 18 - WHY SO MANY DENOMINATIONS?**

The words "denominate", "denomination", "denominational" are words all of which denote divisiveness, as denominations of coins and currency, parts of the whole. Jesus Christ prayed that His disciples (followers) would all "be one" (John 17:17). So, why so many denominations in what is called "Christianity" today?

## **JUNE 25 - IS IT NECESSARY TO BE A MEMBER OF CHRIST'S CHURCH?**

What about Jews? Muslims? Hindus? Will they be saved? Who is to say? What does the Judge say about who can be saved and who will be saved? Must one believe in Christ to be saved? What is meant by "believe in Christ?"

"Churches of Christ, Who Are We?"  
Acts 2:42-47

In Search of the Lord's Way is presented here every week at this time by churches of Christ in the area of this station. Who are these people? Are they some kind of a "cult-like-sect"? Well, you may have heard that. What do they believe? That is our study today. Stay with us.

Welcome, my friend, to our Bible study program In Search of the Lord's Way to become and to be a Christian. If you were watching "CNN Headline News" on the evening of March the 27th, you may have witnessed a defamation of these churches of Christ that support this program. (Surely it was not an evil intent of the hostess of that segment of the program to smear churches of Christ. I have no way of knowing. God knows.) Whatever were her motives; if what she said was an attempt to learn who we are and what we believe, why would she invite a Baptist preacher to define us? I wondered, as perhaps you did, if she thought a Baptist preacher would know more about who we are and what we believe than one of us would know.

Anyway, the sad result was the Baptist preacher defined churches of Christ as a "cult-like sect," or "a borderline cult" begun about 150 years ago by Alexander Campbell. So???? The church of our Lord has been mistakenly and derogatorily dubbed a sect for almost 2000 years now. And if you doubt what I am saying, get your Bible and read it in Acts chapter 28, verse 22. Some of the leaders of the Jews said to the imprisoned apostle Paul "...We desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere." So, that is nothing new. But, to be described as a cult or a "borderline cult" is not only new, it is also absolutely false, my friend.

Because of this program and because it is the most widely received messenger churches of Christ have in America at this time, many of you viewers, and others who don't have the privilege of seeing the program, have written me requesting that I speak to the matter of who we really are-- and what we really do believe. Though I have been delayed awhile with an attack of laryngitis, I am glad to comply with those requests and suggestions. We plan, the Lord willing, to devote four messages to that this month. Tell your friends and invite them to tune us in, too.

Our Bible reading today is in the book of Acts, chapter two. And this is one of the memorable occasions in all of the Bible. This is when the Lord promised that the Holy Spirit would come upon the apostles and He did come. The apostle Peter preached the first gospel sermon and the people who heard believed and were baptized and we are going to begin reading in verse 42 of this second chapter and see what happened. "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." We read through verse 47 and that is the first time that we read about the church in existence in the Bible. That is a great message. Let us pray. Holy Father, we are so thankful that Christianity is in itself a matter of relationships-- our relationship with Jesus, our reconciliation and our relationship with You, and our relationship with all the redeemed in all the world in the church. And that is what the church is all about and we thank You for this relationship we have with the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit and the saved. In the name of Jesus we thank You. Amen.

My friend, I must begin by telling you that neither I nor any other one person or one congregation or group of persons or a group of congregations or a university or a publication can speak "officially" for all churches of Christ. We are a group of something near 9,000 independent congregations in the United States consisting of about 1,400,000 to 1,500,000 adherents in the United States and its territories. And world-wide, who can say? Well, there may be some that we know nothing about. Several years ago, it was reported by some Americans traveling in India that they came upon some people who taught, believed and worshiped just as we do in churches of Christ here in the United States. Until then, none of us knew anything about them. But certainly the Lord did. Well, we think we know of some 27,000 churches of Christ around the world. That would include those within the United States of course. Those congregations we know about consist of more than two million adherents-- including those within the United States. And just as they were in the days of the New Testament, these churches are completely autonomous. They are truly self-determining. I mean, they are not bound together by acceptance of a common human creed or catechism, or confession of faith-- or by any kind of ecclesiastical hierarchy such as a convention or conference. Yet they share a common faith. They worship alike; they preach the same gospel. Oh yes, there are some divisions among us, as there were in some of the New Testament congregations. For that, we stand rebuked by the New Testament teachings, just as those churches in the New Testament were. Well, we should be striving much harder than we are for greater unity among ourselves. There is no doubt about that. Read Ephesians 4:1 to 6. In spite of those divisions though, we are generally bound together as "churches of Christ," by three important factors: First, is a common love for God and His Son Jesus Christ. God is the Father of us all and Jesus Christ who redeemed all of us is our only and everyone's Savior-- He is also our elder brother. He is "elder brother" to all of us who are redeemed by His blood. Number two, we are drawn together by our love for one another, and three, we have a strong commitment to being Biblical in our faith and work and worship and teaching.

In view of the disbelief and disrespect for anything called "church," that is so common nowadays in our American society, I think it is necessary that I define the word "church" in the beginning of our study. One of the definitions my dictionary has for "church" is "a building for public and especially Christian worship." It gives as a synonym for "church" the word "denomination." Well, we all know our dictionaries of English or American words define words according to their common usage. And, the word translated "church" in most of the English versions of the Bible doesn't mean either a building or a denomination. "Denomination" means to name and to divide. That is to denominate anything. For example, we name and divide our coins into "nickels," and "dimes" and "quarters." The church of Christ in the Bible is not divided into denominations and named accordingly. It doesn't consist of denominations. Neither is it one of many denominations.

What do you think, my friend, that Jesus meant when he said in Matthew 16:18: "I will build my church?" Was He saying, "I will build My denomination?" Do you think when the Bible says in Acts chapter 20, verse 28, "...the church of God which He purchased with His own blood," is it saying, "the denomination which He purchased with His own blood?" N-o-o-o, no, friend, you don't get that idea from the Scripture. Even so, the church belonging to Christ is not a denomination or a blending of man-made denominational churches, each fashioned to conform to some one person's charm-- or opinion. Well, do you think it is possible for a church right here in town, who is dedicated to being Christ's church, just as it is described in the New Testament, can possibly do that? I don't see why they can't. Would that make them a cult? Noooo. Or a sect? Noooo. Well, if these more than two million people around the world are striving to be what they read in their Bibles, can they do it; I say, "Let's

you and me do it, too!" Whatta ya say? I can get excited about that! I want to be a part of that! And, if that isn't what the Bible is all about, I don't know what good it is to anybody. That is who and what we are trying hard to be, my friend.

Now, what do churches of Christ believe? Well, one way we can know a person-- or a group of persons, is by knowing what he-- or they-- believe. It is as I explained earlier, I can't speak for all the churches of Christ, but I get around among us all pretty well and the churches with whom I have been associated--and am presently associated-- believe the following things:

First: We believe in One God (I Corinthians 8 and 5), the God of the Bible, manifested in three ways: God, the Father (Matthew 6 and 9); God the Son (John 1:1 to 14) and God the Holy Spirit, and these three are one (I John 5:7). God knew the need and He planned the scheme for human redemption. Christ procured it. And the Holy Spirit revealed it.

Next, we believe that the Bible is the inspired (meaning, the God-breathed) Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16-17). That it is absolutely authoritative, and that it completely supplies the child of God with everything he needs for the direction of his life with God in this world, and to direct him in his work for the Lord, in his worship also, and in his relationships as well-- well, as the Scripture says, it furnishes him to every good work. We believe that any human creed, if it contains more than the Bible, contains too much. If it contains less than the Bible, it contains too little, and if it contains the same as the Bible, it is superfluous, useless and it is dispensable. Not only that, but human creeds are divisive, by whatever form they take, or by whatever name they are called or who wrote them, or whatever good intent that was behind their writing. I don't believe the Bible, and just the Bible, makes a congregation a cult, do you? One of the earmarks of a cult is that it is founded by some charismatic character, who is supposed to have had some special communication from God. He has written that communication in a book which he (or she) claims to be inspired of God, and as authoritative, or even more so than the Bible. Although occasionally one of us comes along and occasionally, and well and acts like he thinks, or she thinks, that they are the one. Churches of Christ have no such person, my friend.

Number 3: We believe that some behavior is sinful. That isn't being judgmental; that is just one of the facts of life. And, because God says it in His Bible (Romans 5:12), we believe that all people who have grown to the state of mental accountability have sinned against God. We don't believe that we were born totally depraved, unable to think a good thought or do a good deed, and guilty of Adam's transgression. We are not held accountable for the sins of our foreparents. Read Ezekiel 18. We went that way soon after we were born (Psalm 58 and 3). Our iniquities have separated us from God and hidden His face from us (Isaiah 59 and 2). And, seeing that a person is unable to save himself by any scheme or plan or work of his own, or any other human, he must appeal to the grace of our God, our offended God for forgiveness of our sins (Ephesians 2:8 to 10). We believe God was s-o-o-o gracious that He gave His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, that through faith in Him, any sinner can be forgiven and reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:17-21). Jesus once said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6).

Number 4: We believe, because the Bible teaches it, that God requires of the sinner that he believe in His Son in order to be forgiven (John 3:16) It isn't a request or a helpful suggestion; it is an absolutely necessity, a requirement, a command, if you please. So, while He has opened the door wide enough to include, "whosoever will," (Revelation 22:17), He does exclude many, many, many more people who will not believe in Christ as His Son. Is that being cult-like?

Number 5: We also believe, because the Bible quotes Jesus as saying "to those Jews who

believed Him" (mind you now, they were believers in Jesus), "if (if, if, if he says) you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed" (John 8:32). He once asked His apostles: "Why do you call Me Lord, and do not do the things which I say" (Luke 6:46) -- a good question for us today. Therefore, we believe the faith that saves is not the "dead faith" that James describes in James 2:26, but a faith that does what the Lord says. Surely, surely no one seriously thinks that a person, who just will not do what the Lord says, is going to be saved. If so, he needs to read Matthew 16:24 again.

Jesus preached "repentance" more than any other Bible preacher or writer. To some He said, "Unless you repent you will all...perish" (Luke 13:3 and 5). And after His resurrection, He charged His apostles saying, "Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations." That is Luke 24, verses 46 and 47. And He commissioned them to begin that work in Jerusalem, which they did. And when they did-- the very first time one of them preached it-- it was Peter and he said, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). We in churches of Christ tell people that same thing who want to be saved today. Let us pray. Father, we thank You for your church, the revelation of your will in the Bible. Help us to follow it diligently. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

When those people heard the apostle Peter preach on that day of Pentecost and he told them to repent and be baptized everyone of them in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins, those who gladly received the word were baptized. And that day about 3,000 souls were added to them (Acts chapter 2 verse 41). And verse 47 says "they were praising God and having favor with all the people and the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." Then just as we said in the beginning the church is the people-- the saved people, they are called people. They are called of God himself out of the world to form the body of the redeemed. The Lord saved them so the Lord knew who to add to the church. Therefore, the church and the saved are the same people. Hey, that clears up this question we create when we say, "I am saved but I don't want anything to do with the church," doesn't it? It isn't that they had a membership roster kept by one of the apostles or someone chosen by them. But the Lord added their names to the book of life that we read about in the book of Revelation, chapter 3, verse 5. Did that make them a "cult?" Oh, if so must be those people formed the first cult. I don't believe it, my friend, not for a moment and you don't either, do you?

The word "church" appears 114 times in the King James New Testament; 77 times in the singular number and 37 times in the plural. Even when it is plural it doesn't mean "denominations." In the plural form it references congregations of the same faith in a general locality such as in Galatians chapter 1, verse 2: "the churches of Galatia." And in Acts 9:31 there is the reference to the "churches throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria." However, there are times it is used to denote the membership of a church-- "the churches of the Gentiles" (Romans 16:4). In that same chapter (Romans 16:16), the Scripture says, "The churches of Christ greet you," indicating the congregations were the possessions of Christ. He "purchased the church with His own blood," one soul at a time, and as each one was saved; He added them to the church. Therefore, the church is His blood-purchased possession. Why anybody would not want to be a part of it puzzles me. Well, it is obvious there are a lot of misunderstanding about what the Lord's church is all about, isn't there? That is one reason I am devoting all these programs this month to the subject of the church. It isn't my purpose to be contentious or offensive, but to be helpful and informative. And I hope you take me that way.

"Who Began the Church of Christ, and When?"  
Matthew 16:13-19

"Church." Whose idea was it anyway? Was it a good idea, or a bad one? Well, the answers we will get on that will be as many as the colors of the rainbow. Did you know that word "church" appears 114 times in the New Testament? So, it is a biblical subject. Let us see what the Bible says about it.

Thank you, my friend, for joining in our Bible study In Search of the Lord's Way to become and to be a Christian. We know all the choices of the programs you have at this time, and we are glad you chose ours. If you are new to our program, you need to know we are closed captioned for the hearing impaired people you may have in your household. And you also need to know that you will not be harassed with appeals for money because we are presented here by churches of Christ right here in your area.

Who are these people in churches of Christ? Do they form a "cult?" If you were watching the Nancy Gray segment of the CNN nightly news program on the evening of March 27th, you may remember that the hostess of that one segment of the newscast interviewed a Baptist preacher in which she said was attempting to learn something about churches of Christ-- who we are and what we believe. I don't know why she asked a Baptist preacher. Would he know more about us, who we are and what we believe than one of us would? A-n-y-w-a-y, I asked one of my staff to download the interview so I would know what the man actually said. And he identified churches of Christ as "a cult-like sect," "a borderline cult," one of the youngest, begun about 150 years ago by Alexander Campbell. Well, some good, honest people have been so misinformed that they believe that.

Our Bible reading today is that familiar passage in the gospel of Matthew, the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter. We will begin reading at verse 13. "When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, Am?" So they said, some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the Prophets. He said to them, but who do you say that I am? Simon Peter answered and said, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus answered and said to him, blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed it to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." We read through verse 19. Now let us go to God in prayer. Our heavenly Father, we are so thankful indeed for the wonderful relationship we sustain, relationships that we sustain in the church, and we are thankful for our relationship with You as our heavenly Father and with our savior, Jesus Christ, as our redeemer, and with one another as the redeemed of God. And we pray, Father, that You will bless our study in this relationships today. In His name we pray, Amen.

In the event you didn't get to hear the message last week, I need to begin again by saying; no one can speak officially for all churches of Christ. We are a closely knit fellowship of independent congregations as those were in the days of the New Testament. We have no organization larger than the congregation. We subscribe to no one's creed by whatever name it might be called, no university or publication, no one person (certainly, not I) can speak officially to what all of us believe and teach. We are in perfect agreement on this one thing, though: acceptance of the Bible as our only rule of

faith and practice. Just as it is about everything, everything nowadays-- law and morals and-- well, most everything else you can think of-- we have those who give a more strict (or some would say "conservative") and some who are more loose (some would say more "liberal") in their interpretation of the Scriptures. Then, there is the vast majority of congregations who are, for the most part, fitting the word we will say they are "moderate." They do as God told Moses in Deuteronomy chapter 5, verse 32, to "turn neither to the right hand or to the left." We try hard to avoid extremism. Of course you know, in our present-day atmosphere, anyone who adheres strictly to the Bible as his sole rule of faith and morals, is considered an "extremist." And this one fellow went so far as to use the word "cult-like." Well, it isn't for us to question the honesty of his intent, although, his information is extremely limited and his choice of words was very poor.

Now let us move on to the message of the day, "Who Began the churches of Christ, and When?" In the first part of the third chapter of his letter to the church at Ephesus, the apostle Paul affirmed his apostleship. Because he became the apostle of Christ, as he, himself, says in 1 Corinthians 15:8, "as one born again out of due time," he had to contend with that denial everywhere he went. He began his affirmation in verse one of this chapter, but for time's sake, I am going to pass over those first seven verses today and we will call your attention to what he wrote in verses eight to eleven.

"To me, who am less than the least of all the saints," he said, "this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Christ Jesus; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus..." You see, my friend, that a way, way back before time was-- before the events of Genesis chapter one-- in eternity-- God had the church in His mind and in His "masterplan" for creation. Philosophers have long said the church was a good thing until Paul organized it into a church, or Christianity was a good thing until Paul organized it into a church. Well, I would not dare to disparage the church by calling it a mere human arrangement, Paul's or anyone else's. The church you read about in your Bible is a vital part of God's eternal plan-- even before the creation. Eight times in the Scriptures it is called "the church of God." And three times the congregations are called "churches of God." It is no wonder the man of God wrote in verse 21 of Ephesians chapter three: "to Him (that is, to God) be glory-- in the church-- by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen."

And, as God always acts with purpose He did so with the church. He created it with a purpose. It was His intention for the church to be the agency to tell the true story of salvation to all people everywhere in every generation. So now you know the mission of the church of God. Yes, yes, yes, members of the church are to "love one another, of course so. And they are to be good people in a world of evil, and they are to live in families, and support good works. All that and more. And that is who we are. We are the children of God! But the church's business, the church's mission, is to preach and teach the gospel to every creature in the whole world!

So, God the Creator planned the church even before the events of Genesis 1:1. A-n-d, in the passage we read for our text, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, announced to the apostles and subsequently to the whole world, "I will build my church." Please excuse my cough as you know for several weeks now I have been suffering from this laryngitis problem, but I think it is improving and I thank you for bearing with me. But, anyway Christ also assured the apostles that "the gates of Hades" would not prevail against it." By that, He was not saying the church would always thrive and prosper



because Satan and all his devils would never have sufficient power to prevail against His church. Neither the grammatical construction of the sentence nor the context demands that interpretation. Besides being wrong, that teaching in churches of Christ has been extremely unfortunate-- destructive, and besides that, it is false. It has lulled many of us into a deep sleep, from which we have yet to awaken!

Well, what was Jesus saying, then? He was saying "the gates of Hades" will not prevail against it or my building it. My friend, death is the only entrance, or it is "the gates of Hades," the only entrance into the hadean world. Jesus knew the time was swiftly approaching when He was to suffer death. And in substance, He was saying, "Evil men will soon crucify Me, but you apostles can be comforted in this: I will be build my church. I will do it! Even death can not prevent it! I will build My church." And in spite of the crucifixion at the hands of wicked men, He did it, friend! Because only about two months later, in Acts 2:47, He is found adding to the church daily those who were being saved. That is the first time we read about the church in actual existence. But, it is mentioned some 109 times after that in the King James New Testament as a reality. Furthermore, it is referenced in many different types and figures, such as His body (1 Corinthians 12:27); the kingdom of Christ (Ephesians 5:5); the bride of Christ (Revelation 22 and 17), oh, in other ways, too.

"Church of Christ" is not the "name." That terminology is possessive. The church of the Bible belongs to Christ. First, because He built it. He said He would (Matthew 16:18). Two, it is His because it is built upon the foundation of His proven Deity (Matthew 16:18). Number 3, because He "purchased" it member by member, with His own blood (Acts 20:28). And number 4, because He is the head of it (Ephesians 1:22 and 23). And number 5, because He is its Savior (Ephesians 5:23), its Redeemer (1 Peter 1:18). It is His church, my friend! And, God is glorified in it, when it is as He designed it.

Of course, Bible students know the church began on the day of Pentecost (AD 30 or 33, depending on the way you measure time). It was when the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles as Jesus had promised them in John 16:5 to 15; and Acts 1 and 5, and Peter preached, and "about three thousand souls were added to them," (verses 38 to 42). Well, you need to read the whole second chapter of Acts as a matter of fact. It began in Jerusalem, the church did. But it spread rapidly, just as the Lord had planned it, in "Judea and Samaria, to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:7 and 8). And the apostle Paul said only about thirty years later that it had spread to every creature under heaven (Colossians 1:23). Reliable historians tell us that with a-half-billion people in the world, by the end of the first century, only about seven decades at the most, there were, well, already more than one million Christians! They also tell us that that church in the first century, without our modern means of communication and transportation, was the fastest growing movement of any kind in the history of the world to this present day! It is amazing, isn't it! It is exciting! And that was during one of those periods when the Lord's church was persecuted most -- and most severely than any time in its near two-thousand-year history! Much of that time, Christians were forced to remain anonymous and to assemble for worship in secret places.

The Jews had rejected Jesus as the Messiah of the Old Testament prophecies. They had crucified Him. And, they were no less friendly toward His church. In fact Jesus warned the apostles, "You will be hated by all for my name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved...It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub (the prince of devils), how much more will they call those of his household!" Well, that is Matthew 10:22, 24, and 25. So, it is as Peter said in 1 Peter 4 and 12,

"Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as through some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings..." That is applicable to the 21st century churches of Christ, too. Beloved, don't think it strange that unlearned and evil men speak evil of you. They called our Savior and Leader "the prince of the devils." So, we shouldn't be all that surprised that they say things about us-- His followers-- that are not true. Just don't be persuaded and defeated by such things.

Why do you suppose the church of the New Testament grew so mightily? Why do you think they were sometimes dubbed "those men who turned the world upside down" in Acts 17 and 6? Could it have been because they believed and taught something extremely different from the cultures into which they took the gospel? Or, might it have been because they were willing to compromise their doctrine and conform to, conform their Christian lifestyle and become like the world around them? Would they desert the Lord to get more "joiners" and maintain a popular stance in the community of the lost? Only the spiritually blind can't see that? They were-- and they taught something that was new and different and fresh! They certainly could have avoided a lot of that persecution because, well Jesus said they would experience some of that, had they not been so different, so unassuming, and so unyielding, and so demanding. It may be-- perhaps-- could it be that is one reason they were dubbed a "sect." I am saying, the Lord's church today might be called a "cult-like-sect" because it is different, and it teaches a different doctrine than people can hear down the street or up the street or across the street in other religious groups. I am simply running out of time now, so please go to your Bible and read 1 Peter, the second chapter, verse nine and forward, and Titus chapter 2, verse 14. Pray with me now. Father, we are thankful to You for your word and for the distinctiveness of Christianity that is to be the light of the world. In Jesus' name, Amen.

We have shown from the Bible that the church was planned by God, and begun in Jerusalem by the risen Christ on the first Jewish Day of Pentecost following the death, the burial, and the resurrection of Christ. Churches (not denominations, now, but congregations of that one church begun by Christ in Jerusalem) sprang up in Antioch and Syria and Islands of Cyprus, then in Antioch of Pisidia and later over in Asia, in Ephesus, and the regions of Galatia,-- and on and on and on, as the gospel was preached churches sprang up all over the known world-- in Europe, in Corinth, and Athens and Thessalonica and Smyrna and Pergamum and Thyatira and Rome and the British Isles and to North and South America and on and on to the end of the world. You see the gospel of Christ produces churches of Christ wherever it is preached, and believed and obeyed. Neither in the first century or the twenty-first century, are the churches of Christ even trying to be just another denomination. We are not even trying to be the only right denomination. We are not trying to be a denomination at all, my friend. We are trying to be all the church you read about in the New Testament in this twenty-first century. Doesn't that excite you? It does me! None of us has ever become a perfect Christian, but we keep trying. Just so, no church that I ever knew anything about was a perfectly developed church of Christ, but, we are still working at it!

"Why So Many Denominations?"  
I Timothy 4:1-5

Are churches of Christ a "borderline cult" like Jim Jones' or David Koresh's church in Waco, TX? Or, are we just another denomination? Just who are we? Let me introduce us to you today, will you?

Thank you, thank you, my friend, for joining our Bible study In Search of the Lord's Way for becoming a Christian and living the Christian life. The first four books of the New Testament, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, reveal to us God's perfect pattern for Christian living in the person of Jesus Christ. Acts, the fifth book, tells us how to become one of His disciples. It gives example after example of true conversion to Christ and His way of life. The letters or the epistles, beginning with Paul's to the Romans, reveals to us the perfect pattern for the church that Jesus established. Although no one has ever measured up to the perfect pattern for the Christian's personal life, as it is revealed in Jesus, all true disciples keep striving for it. And the same is true with the perfect pattern for church life. No church I have ever known has ever measured up perfectly to the pattern for the Lord's church, but many of us keep striving for it. And it is far better to aim for the perfect and miss it, than to aim at an imperfect one of human origin and attain it. Don't you agree?

We are reading from the apostle Paul's first letter to Timothy, in chapter 4 beginning at verse one. "Now the Spirit expressly says that in 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. For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer." Now we read through verse 5. Let us go to God in prayer. Holy Father, we come to You in prayer now in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior, to thank You for the radio and television and network possibilities by which we can come together into people's homes and at their invitation, and search the scripture with them for truth and especially the truth about Your way to be born again, to be born into Your family which is the church and to live the Christian life. We pray You now to open our hearts to what we find there and may we obey it all. Amen.

In Acts 20, verses 17 through 38, I believe, is the apostle Paul's farewell to the elders of the church at Ephesus. And in that passage he says, "...take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves."

In the passage we read just awhile ago, in his first letter to Timothy Paul wrote, "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith" (I Timothy 4:1). When he wrote his farewell to Timothy He wrote it again. It was a warning worth repeating! This time he said, "I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (2 Timothy 4, verses 1 to 4).

The apostle Peter also warned: "...there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly

bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed" (2 Peter 2, verses 1 and 2).

Those and other such prophecies began to be fulfilled before the end of the very first century. The church at Ephesus is an excellent example of that. It had been a great church. But, by about 96 AD, while the apostle John was exiled on Patmos for preaching the truth of the gospel, he received the revelation which constitutes the last book of the New Testament. And the church at Ephesus had ceased to be all it had been. The reason I know that is that in Revelation 1:9 to 20 John described the vision he had of the Son of Man standing in the midst of seven golden lampstands. And he didn't understand what those lampstands meant. We probably wouldn't either if the Lord hadn't explained them as He did to John in verse 20. He said, "...the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches." He commissioned John to send letters to each of those seven churches in Asia. One was the church at Ephesus. The Lord's message to that once great church was this: "I know your works... Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place-- unless you repent." That is Revelation chapter 2, verses 1 to 7. That once-great-church would cease to be the Lord's church, if it didn't repent. It isn't that other churches would "mark" or "disfellowship" the one at Ephesus. No, no, nothing like that; that isn't what He said. The Lord said He would remove its candlestick, Himself. So, churches would depart from the faith. and the Son of God would remove their candlesticks, their identity.

Well, it didn't happen in one giant step. Historians tell us that the apostasy developed so slowly, that very likely most members didn't-- and still don't know-- it even happened. Some people living now-- more than twenty centuries later-- still proudly maintain their membership in an apostate church. They take pride in the fact that they can trace their lineage through the centuries all the way back to Acts, chapter two. But, what they don't realize is that they have fallen so far away that that church bears no slight resemblance to the one in the New Testament. The first departures were in organization. Jesus Christ, the risen Lord, is the head of the church that you read about in your Bible (Ephesians 1:22 and chapter 5, verse 23). He has never yielded that position or delegated that authority to any human being, my friend-- no, not even to the apostle Peter. He chose twelve men and taught and trained them to be His apostles (ones sent on His authority) as official "ambassadors" of His kingdom (2 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 20). One of them betrayed Him and was replaced by Matthias (Acts chapter 1, verse 26). The Bible nowhere names successors to any of the other apostles. Later Paul was especially chosen, "as one born out of due time" (1 Corinthians 15, verse 8) to be an apostle-- not a successor to an apostle now, but an apostle. And those apostles live on in the church today through their work and their ministry in the churches. There never were, and there never will be any more apostles in the Lord's church.

According to Ephesians chapter 4, verse 11, Christ also gave some to be prophets. This gift was given to the early church for "the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; till, we come to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the fullness of Christ;" that is Ephesians chapter 4, verses 11 through 16; or until the will of God was perfectly or completely revealed as it is written in 1 Corinthians chapter 13, verse 10. The apostles and prophets live on in the foundation of the church by their teachings in the Scriptures (Ephesians 2:19-22).

There is biblical authority for evangelists and pastors and teachers in the churches today

(Philippians 1:1 for example; and 1 Timothy 3:1 to 14; and Titus chapter 1, verses 1 to 16, and other passages). They continue in each church the work of equipping and edifying the local body of believers.

The New Testament uses six words, elders and presbyters, bishops or overseers, pastors or shepherds, without distinction of office or rank. These were men (always men) chosen from within the congregation by the members of the congregation for the work described in Acts chapter 20, verses 17 through 38 as we read them awhile ago. Titus chapter 1, verse 16 also includes that. And in the New Testament you never read of Synods, Councils, Conventions, Associations or Conferences composed of delegates from all the churches in different localities to constitute an Ecclesiastical Legislative Body. There were deacons in every church though (Philippians 1:1). An example of their work and service is seen in Acts chapter 6, verses 1 to 7 right on into the 8th chapter. The evangelist's work is described in the name given him in Ephesians 4:11-- that of evangelizing or preaching the good news of Christ. Yes, at least two men, Stephen and Philip, chosen by the church to serve tables in the Jerusalem church also preached or they evangelized.

Up to this point, we have had the Bible for our guide. And we are perfectly comfortable with what we read there, aren't we? But now we must rely on reliable historians. So now, if you doubt me on any of the following material, I suggest before you write me, that you go to your public library, to the religious history section, and study these things for yourself. I don't know what books there are in your particular library, but I am fully confident with what is there you will find will support what I am saying.

Reliable historians enable us to know that soon after the apostolic age the standing office of the President of the Presbytery must have been formed, and as having pre-eminent oversight, the person was designed, or was designated "Bishop". So began the apostasy. There was the creation of a new class of officers in the churches known as "country bishops". These began occasional conventions, composed of delegates from different congregations, for the purpose of settling disputes among them, which conventions assumed legislative authority. There soon followed General Synods and Councils with permanent presiding officers called "Metropolitans". Bishops claimed supreme power. They no longer counseled with the presbyters.

The first General Council was called by the Roman Emperor Constantine in 325 A.D. It was supposed to have represented the universal church. John the Faster, Bishop of Constantinople, assumed the title of "Universal Bishop of the church" in A.D. 588. But Boniface II, Patriarch of Rome had the title transferred to Himself to become the first Pope in 606 A.D.

With the exaltation of mere men to positions of legislative power, came significant, there also came significant changes in fundamental doctrines and in worship of the church. For example: First and most obvious is that Christ is no longer head of the apostate church. Second, the Scriptures are no longer the final word, as we are taught in Colossians 3:16-17. Now, it is "church tradition," approved by the council. The First Vatican Council, convened by Pope Pius IX, declared the doctrine of Papal Infallibility; that is when he speaks ex-cathedra (meaning from the chair) on matters of faith and morals he then speaks the law of the Lord.

Third: In the beginning of the church, baptism was for repentant believers only (Acts 2:38). But by the middle of the second century, there appear references by notable "scholars" to baptism of infants, some for it, some opposed it. Baptism had been "for the remission of sins," as taught in Acts 2:38, and it came to be thought that babies were born sinful, it was felt their baptism on their second day of life was essential, lest they should die with inherited sins upon them. Fourth: In the New

Testament, baptism was always administered by immersion (Romans 6:3 and 4). That is the meaning of the word. Baptism is not "by immersion." It is immersion. The first case of sprinkling for baptism was called "clinic baptism," because the subject was very ill. When he had recovered and was about to become a Bishop, he was rejected because it was contended he had not been baptized. Sprinkling for baptism was not fully approved until the Council of Ravenna in 1311 A.D. It has never had the approval of Christ.

Fifth: Instrumental music was not accepted in public worship until in the eighth century A.D. Other matters of worship will have to be taken up later. And we have mentioned these only as illustrations of the apostle Paul's statement in our text that, "...in latter times some will depart from the faith..." They have. And let us pray about it. Father, we are thankful to You for your preservation of your church through the centuries based on the truth that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead as revealed in the Bible. We pray, Father, that we can persuade people everywhere to follow your teachings as they are revealed in your word in the Bible. In Jesus' name, Amen.

You may be wondering about the title that we have given the message today-- and we haven't touched on it yet, have we? Well, the question so many, "Why So Many Denominations?" Let us use the rest of our time there, whatta ya say?

As the centuries rolled on, the departures from the faith became more, and the apostate church, led by men obsessed with their great power, became corrupt morally as well as doctrinally. But, not every one acquiesced or yielded to them. Men of unusual courage--members of the apostate church they were now, who had opportunity to know the Bible and the kind of church they saw in it, sought a "reformation" of the church so as to fit the one they read about in the New Testament. John Wycliff was one such person. He was born sometime around 1320. He has been called "The Morning Star of the Reformation." He is best known for his translation of the Bible into English, making it possible for the English-speaking world to read it for themselves. He made fifty charges against the apostate church. He died in 1384. Martin Luther who lived from 1483 to 1546, has often been called "the father of the reformation." He had 95 objections to the church. He is remembered for having nailed them to the church door in Wittenburg, Germany. John Calvin, 1506 to 1564, was another great reformer. His influence may be stronger among protestants these five centuries later than any of the others that we have mentioned or even could mention.

While these reformers-- and many others we don't have time to mention-- were great men and they came forth with great ideas and a dogged determination to reform the apostate church as it was then, they were just men. And we should accept what they taught only when it is in agreement with the plain teachings of the New Testament. They were united in noble idea of reformation, but they differed sharply on some critical matters of faith and doctrine. And because of those differences, "the old-line" denominations were born. With the idea that denominational Christianity has the approval of God, the door then was opened to the birth of any new denomination a person wants to start on whatever grounds he wants to found it. We can't help but ask the questions Paul asked: "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?"

"Is It Necessary to be a Member of the Church of Christ?"  
Acts 2:41-47

In Search of the Lord's Way is presented by members of churches of Christ in the area of this station. No person or group or publication or university or anyone else can speak authoritatively for all churches of Christ. We are a closely-knit group of independent churches seeking to be like churches that you read about in your New Testament. But who are we today. Stay tuned and we will see.

Say, my friend! It is good to have you with us for Bible study In Search of the Lord's Way. And that is where we will find the Lord's way always-- in the Bible-- nowhere else. We pray we will all be blessed by studying the Bible together today. In case you are new to the program, and some member of your family's hearing impaired, you need to know we are closed captioned, too.

A few weeks ago on the Nancy Grace segment of the CNN evening news program, a very unfortunate and inaccurate statement was made about churches of Christ. It was said that we are a young "cult like sect," having begun about 150 years ago by Alexander Campbell. Since this program is the most widely received such ministry of churches of Christ in America today, it was suggested by many that we explain who we really are and what we really do believe. And that is what we are doing this month. I, personally, have no ill feelings toward the fellow who defined us as he did. It did occur to me, though, that had I been in Nancy Grace's position, I would have asked someone from churches of Christ on my show to find out what we believe. And had I been asked to do the same thing for the Baptist minister's religious affiliation, I would have done some home work-- some study, before I went on the air with a statement like he made. Anyway all our lessons this month have been devoted to that study.

They are being published in this little book. And they are available to you, free, if you would like one. We have had requests for thousands of them already. Some churches of Christ have even requested them by the hundreds for use in their literature rack and outreach ministries. If you would like a free one, write us, In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083, or by e-mail, it is searchtv@aol.com. Our toll free telephone number is 1-800-321-8633. Or you may access all the messages on our website at [www.searchtv.org](http://www.searchtv.org). Now, Ken Helterbrand is going to lead the Edmond, Oklahoma church of Christ in song; and then I will be back for Bible reading and prayer.

We are reading from the second chapter of the book of Acts of Apostles. And we are going to begin reading at verse 41. "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." And I read through verse 47, the end of the chapter. Let us go to God in prayer now. Almighty God, our heavenly Father, it is with grateful hearts that we come to You as we begin our study today, the study of your church. How grateful we are for it. Oh, that we may have a better understanding of what it is and our relationship with You and with other saved people who are in it. Grant it Lord, we pray in the name of

our loving Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

In earlier lessons in this series we have studied about churches of Christ and whose church the saved really are. In the others then following, we considered the questions, who really did begin the church of Christ and when? And then last week in our study we considered the Bible prophecies of a departure from the faith of the gospel, and we studied very briefly how it actually developed. To give it in detail would require a whole year of such programs as these. We talked about the apostate church, the great reformation movement that swept Europe and the beginning of the denominations and all of that. And today, we will be considering an urgent need for returning to the original concept of the church as it is taught in the New Testament. What we read in the New Testament is true Christianity, friend. In view of the departure described in First Timothy 4:1 and 2, not much of what is being marketed as Christianity today really is Christianity. I find no pleasure in saying that, but if you are a student of the Bible, you know it is true, too; don't you? You see no resemblance; do you?

We hold in admiration those men who devoted their lives to an effort to "reform" the apostate church with the intent of bringing it into conformity with the New Testament teaching about the Lord's church. Some of them were so dedicated to the idea that they died for it! Yes! I mean just that! I mean some of them were literally killed, put to death, for teaching and preaching what they believed. And that is hard for people today to understand-- and to believe. You see, what supposes or assumes itself to be "Christianity" in our current environment, is strongly influenced by the worldly philosophy of "relativity of truth." It is considered pure dogmatism in most churches nowadays to speak of "absolute truth" about anything, even about what the Bible says. But, in spite of their good intentions, they failed, these men, the reformists, failed in at least two respects. First, their "reformation" fell short in that they accepted without protest some of the major departures from New Testament teaching. Three quick examples will be sufficient here: first, there is infant baptism; secondly, baptism by sprinkling, thirdly, mechanical instruments of music in the worship of God. Secondly, in protesting major doctrines of the apostate church, they formed creeds of their own. For example: Martin Luther opposed "salvation by meritorious works" as practiced by the apostate church and established as doctrine, "salvation by faith alone." That distinguished his followers from everyone else who professed to be Christians. Does that make Luther and all Lutherans cult-like? No, no, not at all; a denomination, yes, but not a cult.

John Calvin conceived a system of unconditional election, particular redemption, total depravity, irresistible grace and the final perseverance of the saints. He believed all that and taught it so strongly that those who followed him, were (well, still are) known as "Calvinists." Did that make all of them a "cult?" Be careful now how you answer that question, because if you reply in the affirmative you are going to label that Baptist preacher who called churches of Christ "a borderline cult." one himself. Those things you see, and others like them, gave birth to divisions or denominations, with their separate creeds, confessions of faith, and so on-- and they fathered the "old line denominations" or divisions in their efforts. By "old line denominations," I am saying the old ones-- in contrast to the new ones that are springing up daily. You see, when the idea of denominationalism gained approval of the religious community, it became popular to be the founder of a new one. It became the smart thing to say, "We may disagree on how to be saved. If you feel like you are saved, we will accept you regardless of what God says in his word."

In the latter part of the 18th and early 19th centuries there were groups of people who, well, found among the reformers, among the founders and the reformers of Europe, recognized those failures and they rejected the idea of "reformation." They sought a "restoration" of the kind of



Christianity they read about in their New Testaments. In other words, they were saying, "Back to the Bible. Let's get back to the Bible." By that time the printing press had been invented, and ordinary people had access to the Bible. Well, they sought not to be a denomination of their choice, but to be "just Christians" with no separating labels-- simply members of the church Jesus Christ said He would build. Groups of them (congregations) were founded in Morrison's Court, Glasgow, Scotland in 1778; Leith Walk, Edinburgh, Scotland in 1798; in North Wales in 1779; Tubemore, Ireland in 1807; Manchester, England in 1810, and other places.

It shouldn't be surprising to any of us, then, that with the discovery and the development of the "New World," America, some of these people came to these shores and established churches here. James O'Kelley, a Methodist minister who favored congregational government and the Bible as the only rule of faith and practice, established a church of Christ in Mankintown, North Carolina in 1793. Dr. Abner Jones, a physician from Hartland, Vermont, a Baptist who became dissatisfied with human names and creeds, established a church of 25 members at Lyndon, Vermont; one at Bradford and another at Piermont, New Hampshire in 1803. Barton W. Stone, a Presbyterian preacher, but with reservations as far as the Westminster Confession of faith was concerned, worked largely in Kentucky. Thomas Campbell and his son Alexander Campbell were former ministers in the Seceder Presbyterian church; they came to America (well, I am not saying both of them came in 1807, but along about that time). Thomas came first and Alexander followed later and they settled in Washington County Pennsylvania. Later they became Baptists. Through more Bible study, they became conscious of the necessity of baptism "for the remission of sins," as they were reading it in Acts chapter 2, verse 38, and in November 1843, they were forced to leave the Baptist church to preach New Testament Christianity. Walter Scott, a Presbyterian, came to America in 1818; they realized the error of human standards in religion and infant baptism, and they renounced them in order to be "just a Christian." Now, this is but a brief mention of only a few of the people and their work in churches of Christ-- many of them before the work of Thomas Campbell or Alexander Campbell. But, it is enough for any thinking person, and any student, to see that Alexander Campbell did not begin the church of Christ. How-- or how much he was influenced by those who went before him, we may never know. The point is: there were churches of Christ in existence in Europe and America, and only God knows where else before the days and the work of Alexander Campbell. Multitudes-- thousands of people were taught and inspired to be non-denominational Christians. This "Restoration" idea of the 19th century has been acclaimed even by secular historians of America in history as "The Second Great Revival Period in American history." The idea of being Christians and churches just like the ones we read about in the New Testament spread like some of the wild fires that we have experienced in Oklahoma and Texas this year.

Alexander Campbell's work is appreciated by people who understand what it was and what he did. But he did not originate or found the church of Christ. Jesus Christ said, "I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). In substance He was saying, "Men may slay me, but they will not prevent me from building my church." Yes, they did kill Him, but they didn't prevent His building His church. He built it upon the solid rock foundation expressed by the apostle Peter, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:17). The Bible says in I Corinthians 3:11, "No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." I hear preachers saying, "I preach Christianity, not churchanity." Shame on them! It is impossible to teach the full story of Jesus Christ, and not teach about Him as the "true Stone," the foundation stone, the builder of His church (Isaiah 28:16).

Soooo, for all the Nancy Grace's wherever you may be or whoever you may be, who comes up with the question, "Do members of churches of Christ believe you have to be a member of their church to go to heaven?" Let me say this. Whoever you are, please hear me; hear me out now, will you, please? Saved people-- I am talking about people the Lord saved, He added to His church. I mean people who really are going to heaven in the life to come, aren't given the choice of being-- or not being-- members of His church." That is what the church is, friend-- saved people! If you want to be saved, but you don't want any affiliation with other people the Lord has saved, well, there is something wrong about your faith. Furthermore, you probably won't be happy in heaven if you should go there, because that is where all the faithful church will be. The Lord doesn't say to you, "Come follow me, and I'll take you to heaven, but you won't have to associate with those ugly old cult-like members of my church." No, that isn't the way it will be. The Lord adds to the church daily those who are being saved. And we read it awhile ago from Acts 2:47. He-- and He alone-- does the saving (Acts 4:12); therefore He knows who is saved. And no vote of a denomination, no conference or convention, has anything to do with it.

So, does that make churches of Christ a "borderline cult?" "Oh," but you say, "I'm a member of the Lord's church alright, but I am a member of such-and-such a denomination of His church." Oh, I see. Which one? Is it the one of Cephas? Or of Paul? Or of Apollos? As Paul asked the members of the church of God which is at Corinth in I Corinthians 1:1 to 13. Or is it the one of Luther? Or Calvin? Or Stone? Or Campbell? And let me ask you as the apostle did the Corinthians. "Is Christ divided?" Did that man whose denomination you joined die for you? Were you baptized in his name? Occasionally I hear or read of people talking or writing about being members of "one of the Stone-Campbell churches." My friend, I am not. When Jesus saved me, I mean, that day-- He inscribed my name in His "book of life" in heaven (Philippians 4:3). It was Jesus Christ Himself who added me to His church (Acts 2:47). And, you know what? It was at least a whole decade, ten years or more, later that I first heard the name of Alexander Campbell. Yes, it was! And I believe Jesus has done for every saved person since the day of Pentecost following the resurrection of Jesus Christ, just what He did for me! And that is enough for me! Thank God, I don't have to answer your question about who is going to be saved in heaven and who is not, because I believe the Lord knows every person He has ever saved-- and He has added them all to His church. To put it another way, I am saved by His blood! I am a member of His church! And I am not ashamed of either of them.

Thank God, He hasn't given me the heavy responsibility of saying who is going to heaven and who is not. But, He has told me in His word, how to be saved, and if I preach, I am bound by His word and my conscience to tell you exactly what He says in His word about being saved. And, it is entirely between you and Him whether you do it or not. Jesus is presented to us in both Old Testament prophecy and New Testament reality as the Savior of the world (Acts 4:42). Jesus Himself, after He had proved Himself to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead, said "All authority is given to me in heaven and on earth....Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved." That is from Matthew's and Mark's recording of the same incident in Matthew 28:18 and Mark 16:15-16. Luke's account of that event is a bit different. He quoted Jesus as saying, "...that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:46).

And when the apostle Peter preached the very first sermon under that commission, he told the people who believed his message to "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit...Then those who gladly received his word were

baptized, and that day about three thousand souls were added to them...And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:38, 41, 47). And that is what I am telling you, my friend. I hope you will be among those who gladly receive the gospel message of salvation in Christ, and permit Him to add you to His church. Will you? Oh, I hope you will. I must tell you, and the decision-- whether you do it, or not do it, is between you and the Lord. Many people who confess Jesus as Lord have refused to do so, and believe they are going to heaven. But, just remember, it was Jesus who said, "Why do you call Me Lord, Lord, and not do the things which I say" (Luke 6:46).