

## What Is The Church Of Christ

To what do the words **churches or church of Christ** (Romans 16:16) really refer? Does this biblical phrase have any reference to denominationalism? Is the church of Christ today merely one of several denominations that comprise the religious community? What is the church of Christ?

Ironically, at least one prominent commentator exhibits in his writings a notion of the true nature of the church of Christ. Yet, he completely fails to realize that he and his fellows can or need to **personally** attain membership in it.

Adam Clarke, for instance, refers to the "Church of Christ" as something that is aloof and distinct from denominationalism. Clarke treats the "Church of Christ" as a spiritual structure — built by Jesus Christ. Commenting on Galatians 6:10, Clarke writes:

"Let us help all who need help according to the uttermost of our power but let the first objects of our regards be those who are of the **household of faith** — the members of the **Church of Christ**, who form **one family, of which Jesus Christ is the head.**"

In his comments on 1 Corinthians 14:36, he pens: "Are you the mother church? that you should have rules, and orders, and customs, different from all others; and set yourselves up for a model to be copied by all the Churches of Christ?" Clarke also freely uses other biblical terminology descriptive of the one church of the Bible: "Church of God" (referring to the same verse).

Of false teachers addressed in Romans 16:18, Clarke writes: ". . . they have intruded themselves into the Church of Christ . . ."

Regarding the canonicity of the Book of James, Clarke further writes of the first century church thus: "The chief and proper evidence of its being canonical must be taken from the fact that it was universally received by the Church of Christ, and without scruple incorporated with those writings, which were, on all hands, allowed to have been given by the inspiration of God."

However, neither Clarke nor those who share his religious heritage conceive of personal and individual membership in the "Church of Christ." He and others demonstrate an awareness of the essence of the '**church of Christ**' and neglect to apply that knowledge to themselves personally. Remarkably, none of these imagine that the '**church of Christ**' has a physical manifestation and a congregation of which may even meet in their own communities.

There is a spiritual church in contrast to denominations. One does a grave disservice to his own edification and to the promotion of pure Christianity when he identifies the church Jesus built with man-authored sectarianism.

When Jesus said, "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18) or "kingdom" (Matthew 16:19), He was not promising to build an earthly, sectarian church. Jesus also declared that His kingdom (or church) is not of this world, but spiritual (John 18:36).

So, the church of Christ, of which the Bible speaks, is not a denomination! Neither is the church of Christ a spiritual body in which man-made denominations are members. The church of Christ, according to the message of John 15:1-6 (the vine and the branches), is comprised solely of individuals; Verse Six reveals that a branch is "a man" — not a denomination.

Hence, there is no legitimate comparison between the church of Christ and denominations; the former is spiritual in nature and originated with Christ, whereas the latter are worldly and the products of men. Additional to these contrasts, the church of Christ is further distinguished from denominations by its distinctive God-authored worship, organization, mission and valid eternal hope, all of which are abundantly declared in the Bible.

What is the church of Christ? It is not a denomination. It is the personal possession of Christ (Matthew 16:18; Romans 16:16) and it is singular — one church (Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:4). It is a spiritual body over which Jesus is head (Colossians 1:18) and into which individual members are baptized (1 Corinthians 12:12-14). Finally, the church of Christ is a contemporary duplication of first century Christianity, disclosed exclusively in the Bible (Colossians 3:17). Words fail me to adequately impress upon the mind that the church of Christ of which the Bible speaks and of which all men need to be faithful members is so unique that it has **NO RIVALS**. Congregations of the churches of Christ meet throughout the world. There may even be a church of Christ meeting in your community.

*By Louis Rushmore*