

Facts Concerning the New Testament Church

We are often met with the following questions: Are the churches of Christ (or Christian churches) any different from other churches? Why do these churches exist? What do they believe? To answer these questions is the purpose of this article.

WHY DO WE EXIST?

The object of existence is not to add to the many denominations that are now found. A divided church is contrary to the teaching of Christ and His apostles (1 Corinthians 1:10, 11; John 17:21). The world will never be led to Christ so long as sectarian shibboleths continue to be emphasized. The pray of Jesus (John 17), the teaching of the apostles, the condition of the world, and the desire of hosts of Christians demand the laying aside of the doctrines of men and a return to the church as it was in the days of Christ's apostles.

Hence our aim is:

1. The restoration of primitive Christianity and consequent union of all the followers of Christ in one body (John 17:21)
2. To exalt Christ above party and His Word above all human creeds.
3. To build a church of Christ without denominational name, man-written creed or other barrier to Christian unity, whose terms of fellowship shall be as broad as the conditions of salvation and identical with them.
4. To lead sinners to Christ in the clear light of the New Testament teaching.

On nonessentials we admit the largest liberty; on the essentials we appeal to the New Testament. "Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible is silent, we are silent.

OUR BEGINNING

The church was called into existence AD 30, on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ. To know of the organization, its doctrines and fruits, read the Acts of the Apostles. For about two hundred years, it was true to apostolic teaching. But by the mixing of Jewish teaching and pianistic ideas, and through political intrigue, the church of the beginning was lost. Centuries of ignorance and superstition passed by during which the Catholic Church usurped the place of the church of Christ.

In the early part of the sixteenth century, Martin Luther broke the shackles and gave the world the open Bible. Later, Calvin advocated the divine sovereignty of God. John Wesley agitated the question of more spirituality in the churches. Around these ideas great denomination sprang into existence. The people were inquiring for the old paths. While all the church were doing good, had much of the Scripture in their teaching, and possessed good men, they were weakened and handicapped because they divided.

Early in the nineteenth century, there was a general unrest among the churches of America. In all denominations could be found those who believed that the followers of Christ should lay aside the tradition of men and go back to the church described in the New Testament. Among this number were Thomas Campbell and his son Alexander, a young man who had studied in the University of Glasgow. Father and son were members of the Seceders branch of the Presbyterian Church. "They aimed to take up things just as the apostles left them, and thus, being disentangled from the embarrassments of intervening ages, stand with evidence on the same ground on which the church stood at the beginning."

They aimed, not to start another church, but to call the people back to the church of the New Testament. They were not reformers, but restorers. They held up the Bible and by its teaching restored the church of Christ and His apostles.

None doubts but what the church described in the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles is the true church of Christ. To restore that church was the work of Thomas and Alexander Campbell. They began emphasizing this feature of Christian work early in the nineteenth century. Today the people known simply as Christians number several million. Acting as locally autonomous congregations, they cooperate in evangelism, in establishing new congregations, conducting educational and benevolent institutions, and supporting thousands of missionaries.

DIVISIONS OF THE BIBLE

We believe that the Old and New Testament are both the inspired Word of God, but that the New Testament is the exclusive book of authority. Everything that is necessary for the unconverted to do in order to become a Christian, and everything that is necessary for the Christian to do in order to go to Heaven, are found in the New Testament.

The old law is nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14). The Old Testament was for the Jew, the New for the Christian. Many commandments found in the Old Testament are found in the New; but they are binding upon us, not because they are found in the Old, but because they are re-enacted in the New Covenant.

The Old Testament is the New concealed; the New is the Old revealed. We need the Old to help us understand the New. The books have been written for a definite purpose. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John give us a biography of Jesus. We read these to believe on Him. The Acts of the Apostles is a book of church history, in which we see the apostles going forth under the Great Commission preaching the gospel and showing men the way to Christ. The twenty-one Epistles are letters written by inspired men to Christian churches or to Christian individuals, instructing them how to grow in grace and to live the Christian life. The Book of Revelation pictures the destiny of mankind.

We believe that all human creeds and "Confessions of Faith" should be abolished. This must be done before unity can be achieved. All human creeds have come out of controversy. We maintain that the Bible alone is sufficient for our rule of faith and practice. We go the Bible for our authority in church government, as well as to learn the plan of salvation. Whatever the commands us to do, those things we do; what the Bible forbids, from those we refrain; where the Bible is silent, there is freedom of opinion.

The divine confession is: "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." This is the confession of Christendom. We have no right to ask for more than this. Peter made this confession when he said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:16). (Read also Acts 8:36, 37; Matthew 10:32; Romans 10:10.)

We teach that Jesus is the Savior of the world, that to Him all authority is given. He is our Lord, King, Savior, Advocate, Good Shepherd, the Light, the Truth, the Way. The only test of Christian fellowship is Christ. Christ is our creed.

CONVERSION

The Bible teaches a rational plan of salvation. Do what Jesus and the apostles commanded and you will be saved. The Scriptures do not teach us to look for lights and signs, listen for strange voices, or expect to be picked up bodily. The religion of Jesus Christ is intended for all people and is made so plain that all the people can understand it. Conversion is simply a change. Yes, a change of the heart; that is, the intellect (Luke 9:47; Mark 2:8). It says we love and hate with the heart; that is, the affections

(Matthew 6:19, 21). We purpose with the heart; that is, the will (2 Corinthians 9:7). It says the heart condemns and approves; that is, the conscience (1 John 3:20, 21).

So when a man is converted, he is completely changed in intellect, affections, and will. He has done his duty, and hence the heart of mind approves of what he has done, and his conscience is at ease. Faith changes his way of thinking, repentance his will, and baptism his state, and all combined change his relation toward God and make him a Christian. A man who hears the gospel, believes on Christ, repents of his sins, confesses Christ, and is baptized into Christ is a Christian. He has met Christ where Christ promised to meet him. He must then continue faithful unto death and he will receive a crown of life (James 1:12).

THE HOLY SPIRIT

We believe in the personality of the Holy Spirit. He is not an emotion or sentiment, but a thinking intelligence. He can be grieved, rejected, or resisted. He is the third person of the Trinity. In conversion the Spirit operates through the Word. He has told us what to do to be saved. God has ordained that the gospel is the power unto salvation.

THE NAME

The Bible teaches that the children of God should be known simply as Christians. Luke says: "The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch" (Acts 11:26).

Peter says: "If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on the behalf" (1 Peter 4:16).

Paul says party names are wrong. (Read 1 Corinthians 1:12, 13.) Luther said: "Do not call yourselves Lutherans, but Christians."

Wesley said: "I would to God all party names were forgotten." We desire to be called simply Christians, not the only Christians, but Christians only. This is the only name all believers can accept, and it is scriptural.

BAPTISM

Baptism is a positive command. On the authority, subject, action, and design, the Scripture is plain. Read and be convinced.

We do not believe baptism is any more important than faith, repentance, or good works. Neither do we believe there is any virtue in the water. But we believe baptism is an act of obedience commanded by Christ in order to receive salvation.

AUTHORITY FOR BAPTISM

Christ walked about sixty miles to be baptized in the Jordan. When He came up out of the water, the Spirit fell upon Him in the form of a dove and God said: "This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:17). Christ commanded the apostles to baptize (Matthew 28:19). All through the Acts of the Apostles it is shown that wherever men came to Christ they were always baptized (Acts 2:38; 8:12-38; 9:18; 10:48; 16:15-33; 19:5). Read Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:1-7; 1 Peter 3:21; Colossians 2:12.

SUBJECTS OF BAPTISM

All believers are subjects for baptism. Christ said, "Whoever believes and is baptized with be saved" (Mark 16:16). No person is commanded to be baptized unless he is capable of being taught. We are not aware of any account in the Bible of infants ever being baptized. If a person knows of such as passage, he is courteously invited to call our attention to it. Study carefully again the conversions recorded in Acts and you will see that the person baptized was always capable of receiving gospel truths.

The nature of baptism makes it impossible for it to apply to infants, inasmuch as it is declared in 1 Peter 3:21 to be the "pledge of a good conscience toward God," and the infant has no conscience in the pledge.

Infant baptism was not introduced until over one hundred years after the death of the last apostle. Therefore, it is without scriptural authority.

THE ACTION OF BAPTISM

The meaning of the word should determine this. The Greeks had, and still have, a word for immerse, one for sprinkle and one for pour. *Baptizo* means dip or immerse, *rantizo* means to sprinkle, and *cheo* means to pour. This is now the meaning of these words in Greek and was also the meaning when Christ was on earth. Now if Christ had desired the disciples to go forth and sprinkle; if He had desire them to pour; if He had commanded them to use water, regardless of any special action, He would have used the word *hudraino*; but He wanted them to practice immersion, therefore He used the word *baptizo*.

Paul said in Romans 6:4 and Colossians 2:12 that we are buried with Christ by baptism. Can it be possible that Paul was mistaken in this matter? If baptize means to sprinkle, you can insert the word sprinkle in place of "baptize" wherever it is used in the Scriptures, and it will in every case have to make good sense. Try it on Colossians 2:12. It will not work here, because there is no sense in the expression "buried with Christ in sprinkling." So as it fails to work in even one case, it must be dropped.

If baptize means immerse, then we can insert the word immerse where we find "baptize," and it will not spoil the meaning, but make complete sense. Try it on every passage of Scripture in the New Testament relating to baptism and you will find it works everywhere; there is not a single exception.

Let us see what baptism requires and represents in the New Testament. We will then see what immersion and sprinkling requires and represents. If we learn that either one requires and represents the same as baptism does, then that must be the meaning of baptize. Be sure to read the following references in the connection:

BAPTISM REQUIRES

- Water – Acts 8:36; Acts 10
- Much water – John 3:23
- Going to the water – Acts 8:39; Mark 1:9
- Going down into the water – Acts 8:38
- Coming up out of the water – Matthew 3:16; Acts 8:39
- Form of birth – John 3:5
- Form of resurrection – Romans 6:4
- Form of burial – Colossians 2:12
- Form of planting (covered up) – Romans 6:5
- Washing of the body – Hebrews 10:22

IMMERSION REQUIRES

- Water – yes
- Much water – yes
- Going to water – yes
- Going into water – yes
- Coming out of water – yes
- Form of birth – yes
- Form of burial – yes
- Form of resurrection – yes
- Form of planting – yes
- Body washed – yes

SPRINKLING REQUIRES

- Water – yes
- Much water – no
- Going to water – no
- Going into water – no
- Coming out of water – no
- Form of birth – no
- Form of burial – no
- Form of resurrection – no
- Form of planting – no
- Body washed – no

COMMENTATORS AND TRANSLATORS

1. John Calvin (Presbyterian): “The word ‘baptize’ signifies to immerse. It is certain that immersion was the practice of the primitive church.”
2. Luther (Lutheran): “‘Baptism’ is a Greek word, and may be translated ‘immerse.’ I would have those who are to be baptized to be altogether dipped.”
3. John Wesley (Methodist): “‘Buried with him by baptism’ – alluding to the ancient manner of baptizing by immersion.”
4. Wall (Episcopalian): “Immersion was in all probability the way in which our blessed Saviour, and for certain, the way by which the ancient Christians received their baptism.”
5. Brenner (Catholic): “For thirteen hundred years was baptism an immersion of the person under water.”
6. Macknight (Presbyterian): “In baptism the baptized person is buried under the water.” “Christ submitted to be baptized, that is, to be buried under water.”
7. Whitfield (Methodist): “It is certain that the word of our text – Romans 6:4 – alludes to the manner of baptizing by immersion.”
8. Stoudza (a native Greek): “The verb ‘baptize’ has only one meaning. It signifies to plunge. Baptism and immersion are identical. To say baptism by sprinkling is as if one would say immersion by sprinkling.”

9. Jeremiah (Greek patriot): "The ancients did not sprinkle the candidate, but immersed him."
10. Paul (a Christian): "We are buried with him by baptism."
11. Kitto's Encyclopedia: "The whole person was immersed in water."
12. Encyclopedia Americana: "Baptism; that is, dipping or immersion."
13. Brande's Encyclopedia: "Baptism was originally administered by immersion."
14. Smith's Dictionary: "Baptism means immersion."
15. Liddell and Scott: "*Baptizo*, to dip in or under water."
16. Robison (Presbyterian): "To immerse, to sink."
17. Dr. Anthon: "The primary meaning of the word is to dip or immerse. Sprinkling and pouring are out of the question."
18. Bagster: "To dip or immerse."
19. Greenfield: "To immerse, submerge, sink."

SPRINKLING INTRODUCED

"The first law for sprinkling was obtained in the following manner: Pope Stephen II, being driven from home by Adolphus, King of the Lombards, in AD 753, fled to Pepin, who a short time before had usurped the crown of France. Whilst he remained there, the monks of Cressy, in Brittany, consulted him whether, in case of necessity, baptism poured on the head of the infant would be lawful. Stephen replied that it would. But, though the truth of the fact be allowed (which, however, some Catholics deny), yet pouring or sprinkling was admitted only in cases of necessity. It was not till the year 1311 that the legislature, in council held at Ravenna, declared immersion or sprinkling to be indifferent. In Scotland, however, sprinkling was never practiced in ordinary cases till after the Reformation (about the middle of the sixteenth century). From Scotland it made its way into England in the reign of Elizabeth, but was not authorized in the Established Church."

It will be noticed that the change was not made by Christ or the apostles, but it was made by the pope of the Catholic Church.

THE DESIGN OF BAPTISM

1. Introductory. "Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).
2. A Test of Obedience. "Whoever believes and is baptized with be saved" (Mark 16:16). "If you love me, you will obey what I command." (John 14:15). "The pledge of a good conscience toward God" (1 Peter 3:21). This results from obedience.
3. For the Forgiveness of Sins. "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38).
4. Symbolical. (1) Of the burial and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6:3-5); (2) a birth – "born of the water and the Spirit" (John 3:5).

THE LORD'S SUPPER

A. Its purpose:

1. A memorial. Jesus said: "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19)
2. A communion. (1 Corinthians 10:16.) "Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?"
3. To build us up in Christ. The more we reverently think of His death for us, the more we are determined to live for Him.

B. Who can partake:

Compare 1 Corinthians 11:23 and 1 Corinthians 1:1, 2. We here learn that Paul says all who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ gave it to His followers and has never taken it from them. It is the Lord's Table and is spread for His people, and no man, or company of men, can rightfully deprive on of God's children from partaking. Closed Communion is unscriptural.

C. How often to partake:

From Acts 2:42 we learn that the Lord's Supper had a prominent part in the worship of the early disciples. By comparing Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:1, 2, we discover that when the disciples met it was to partake of the Lord's Supper, and it was their custom to meet every Lord's Day. For the first seven hundred years, the ordinance was observed weekly. John Calvin said: "The change was a contrivance of the devil." John Wesley advised his people to spread the table each week.

PRESIDENT GARFIELD

President James A. Garfield, who lived and died a member of the Christian church and was for some years a preacher in the church, was once requested by a lady to formulate a statement that would give her a more definite idea of our position in matters of faith.

The following is Mr. Garfield's statement:

1. We call ourselves Christians or Disciples.
2. We believe in God the Father.
3. We believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and our Saviour. We regard the divinity of Christ as the fundamental truth of the Christian system.
4. We believe in the Holy Spirit, both as to His agency in conversion and as a dweller in the heart of the Christian.
5. We accept the Old and New Testament and the inspired Word of God.
6. We believe in the future punishment of the wicked and the future reward of the righteous.
7. We believe that Deity is a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God.
8. We observe the institution of the Lord's Supper on every Lord's Day. To this Table we neither invite nor debar. We say it is the Lord's Table, for all the Lord's children.
9. We plead for the union of God's people.
10. The Bible is our only discipline.
11. We maintain that all ordinances should be observed as they were in the days of the apostles.