

Uncommon things commonly believed among us

On the first Sunday of each month we have been exploring some of the things we commonly believe in the Churches of Christ that many in the religious world around us do not commonly believe. When such differences exist, I believe we have a responsibility to offer a reasoned, biblical explanation for our different belief. This morning we will consider our belief about the oneness of the church.

We believe Jesus established one church (Matthew 16:13-18)

Beginning Considerations

- We do not believe that the name on a church building guarantees anything by itself (*Romans 2:28-29*).
- While the name “Church of Christ” finds itself in the Bible (*Romans 16:16*), we also understand that the Bible refers to Jesus’ church with other names (“church of the firstborn”, *Hebrews 12:23*; “church of God”, *I Corinthians 1:2*).
- We do believe that defining characteristic of Jesus’ church is its devotion to being like Him by obeying His will as expressed in the Bible (*Romans 8:29*; *John 13:34-35*; *14:15*; *12:47-50*).

Examining the Bible’s evidences for our claims

- Jesus promised to build a church based upon his identity (*Matthew 16:18*).
 - Jesus’ intention to build a church helped to fulfill a long-standing series of promises God made in the Old Testament that looked forward to the coming of Jesus, including the inauguration of his church (*Jeremiah 31:31-34*; *Daniel 2:36-45*).
 - Jesus told his disciples that the anticipated church would be founded upon his identity (*Matthew 16:13-18*).
 - Jesus’ life and death reside at the heart of his identity and provide the sacrifice necessary to reunite people to God (*John 1:29*; *Romans 5:6-11*; *Ephesians 1:7-8a*).
 - But Jesus’ identity offers more for the church than a connection to God; it also offers the pattern of living that the church should model (*Romans 8:29*).
 - The New Testament description of Jesus as the head of the church stresses the connection between his identity and the church - the church cannot exist a part from him (*Ephesians 1:22-23*; *Colossians 1:18*).

- The connection between the church and Jesus' identity led Paul to claim that only one church existed (*Ephesians 4:4; 1:22-23*).
- Because the church has been built on Jesus' identity, Jesus expected the members of his church to be united (*John 17:20-23*).
 - While God unites all members of Jesus' church together (*Ephesians 2:11-22*), the individual members of the church have the responsibility of preserving that unity (*Ephesians 4:1-3*).
 - Jesus' expectation of unity addresses that responsibility and goes beyond mere comrade; it also address the things believed and practiced by the members of the church (*Philippians 2:2; I Corinthians 1:10*).
- Jesus' church finds the standard of its unity in His teachings (*I Timothy 6:3-5*).
 - Jesus taught that His teachings provide the standard against which everyone will be judged (*John 12:47-50*).
 - Jesus promised to His disciples that He would send them the Holy Spirit who would help them remember everything He had taught them and would help them write those things down for the benefit of everyone else (*John 14:26; 16:12-15; I Corinthians 2:11-13*).
 - The New Testament writers therefore correctly claim that the Bible gives us everything we need to understand Jesus' church and to understand what He expects from us (*II Timothy 3:16-17; II Peter 1:3*).
 - For these reasons, Paul wrote that only one faith exists for the church (*Ephesians 4:4-5; Jude 3*).
 - All churches should therefore be united in their beliefs and practices.
 - All beliefs and practices should find clear support in the teachings of the New Testament.
 - Any differences should be rejected (*I Timothy 6:3-5*).
- Given the close connection between Jesus and His church, we should not be surprised that God ties salvation to membership in the church (*Acts 2:36-47; Ephesians 5:23*).

The church holds a special place in God's plan for people's lives today. But its specialness ties directly to its relationship to Jesus. In our world where so many different churches exist, let's demand a return to Jesus and allow his life and teachings to define us.