

BIBLICAL INSIGHTS #48:

TEN FACTS ABOUT THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

By John Temples

(These are notes from a sermon I preached at the Port Charlotte, Florida Church of Christ, August 18, 2019)

1. IN THIS LESSON I WANT TO SHARE WITH YOU TEN FACTS ABOUT THE CHURCH OF CHRIST (COC)—TEN THINGS THAT MAKE THE CHURCH UNIQUE.

- a. Here's why I think this lesson is needed: it's been my observation that many church members are uninformed on the unique nature of the church and on the restoration of the church in modern times.
- b. More and more, I hear church members say, "I go to church here because..."
 - i. I "shopped around" for a church and liked this one the best.
 - ii. This church is friendly.
 - iii. This church is close to where I live.
 - iv. I like the preacher.
- c. Now, all those are good reasons to be here.
 - i. The church should be friendly.
 - ii. It's nice if you don't have to drive far.
- d. But, in the grand scheme of things, those are all **WRONG** answers to the question, "Why are you a member of the COC?"
- e. The correct answer is, "Because it is the Lord's church, the true church, the church that conforms to the Bible pattern."

2. IT'S VERY IMPORTANT THAT YOU REALIZE THE DISTINCTIVENESS AND THE DIVINE NATURE OF THE CHURCH.

- a. The church is not just a social organization.
- b. You shouldn't choose a church like you choose a restaurant.
- c. It shouldn't be that you visited the "buffet of churches" and this dish looked the most appetizing.
- d. So, let me give you ten basic, important facts that make the COC unique in a world of hundreds of different churches.

3. FIRST: YOU CAN FIND THE NAME OF THIS CHURCH IN THE BIBLE.

- a. Romans 16:16—"The churches of Christ greet [salute] you."
- b. Since the Bible gives the divine pattern for the church, and what the church is called is obviously part of that pattern, it should cause me some concern if I cannot find the name of the church I attend in Scripture.
- c. Baptist Church...Methodist Church...Latter Day Saints Church...Seventh-day Adventist Church...Catholic Church...etc., etc.—none of these is found in the Bible!
- d. If you don't think names are important, consider that God named or renamed several people in the Bible as their relationship to Him changed (Abraham and Jacob, for example).

4. SECOND: THE COC IS UNIQUE IN THAT IT EXALTS CHRIST AS ITS ONLY HEAD.

- a. That's because we read in God's word:
 - i. "And [God] put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body" (Eph 1:22).
 - ii. Col 1:18 says, "And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He might have the preeminence."

- b. If Christ has all preeminence, and He is the only head of the church the Bible talks about, then a church with a human head cannot be His church.
 - c. But what do we see in the religious world today?
 - i. The Catholic Church acknowledges the pope as its head.
 - ii. The LDS Church has its First Presidency.
 - iii. Orthodox churches have their Patriarchs.
 - iv. Baptists have a Southern Baptist Convention with a President at the top.
 - v. Every denomination has some kind of manmade governmental structure, with some man or woman or council at the top.
 - d. The Lord's church, though, has Christ, and only Christ, as its Head.
5. THIRD: NOT ONLY DO WE ACKNOWLEDGE CHRIST AS OUR HEAD, WE ALSO POINT TO HIM AS OUR FOUNDER.
- a. Who started this or that church? That is an important question.
 - b. Psalms 127:1 says, "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it."
 - c. The Bible makes it absolutely clear who founded the Lord's church: the Lord. Matt 16:18—"Upon this rock I will build My church."
 - d. But man-made denominations proudly point to some man or woman as their founder. Examples:
 - i. LDS Church—Joseph Smith.
 - ii. SDA Church—Ellen G. White.
 - iii. Christian Science Church—Mary Baker Eddy.
 - iv. Methodist Church—John Wesley.
 - v. Lutheran Church—Martin Luther. (No doubt about that one.)
 - vi. Baptist Church—John Smyth, an English preacher in the 1600s. (This is even proudly stated on www.baptisthistory.org, a Baptist website.)

6. FOURTH: THE COC HAS NO CREED BOOK OR STATEMENT OF DOCTRINE OTHER THAN THE BIBLE.

- a. If you examine every manmade church or denomination, you will find some statement of doctrine other than the NT or added to the NT.
Examples:
 - i. The LDS Church has the Book of Mormon, the Pearl of Great Price, and Doctrine and Covenants. (They do throw in the Bible as one of their “four standard works.”)
 - ii. The Catholic Church has the official teachings of the popes and church councils.
 - iii. The Methodists have the book of Discipline.
 - iv. The Nazarenes have the Nazarene Manual and Articles of Faith.
 - v. The Jehovah’s Witnesses go by the official publications of the Watchtower Society.

- b. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is interesting. It does not claim to have an “official creed.”
 - i. But read this from a church website:
 - ii. “Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church's understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture.”
 - iii. Sounds good, but the next sentence says: “**Revision of these statements may be expected** at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God's Holy Word.”

- c. Mark this down: all man-made churches have some kind of doctrinal statement or creed of human origin, and these creeds change with time.
 - i. They have to, or else they have nothing to distinguish them from any other church.
 - ii. But the COC has no creed except the Bible.
 - iii. We have the NT for **legislation** and the OT for **information**.

7. FIFTH: THE COC BINDS NO NAME ON ITS MEMBERS EXCEPT THE DIVINE NAME “CHRISTIAN.”

- a. This divine name is found three times in the NT:
 - i. Acts 11:26—“And the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch.”
 - ii. Acts 26:28—“Then Agrippa said to Paul, ‘You almost persuade me to become a Christian.’”
 - iii. 1 Pet 4:16—“If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter [some versions say “in this name”].”
- b. Why can’t people be satisfied with the simple name Christian?
 - i. It glorifies Christ.
 - ii. It is Biblical.
 - iii. It is non-denominational.
 - iv. Yet thousands prefer to wear manmade names.

8. SIXTH: THE COC HAS A UNIQUE APPROACH TO BIBLICAL AUTHORITY.

- a. We affirm that if the Bible does not authorize a thing, then we cannot do it.
- b. Why is that unique or different? Because manmade churches go by the principle “If the Bible does NOT say we can’t do it, then we can.”
- c. Churches of Christ, on the other hand, say “We must speak where the Bible speaks, and be silent where the Bible is silent.”
- d. If we cannot find authority in Scripture for a practice--either through a direct statement, an approved example, or logical implication--then we must abstain from that practice.
- e. That is why we do not have instruments of music in our worship—the NT is completely silent as to their use.

9. SEVENTH: THE COC HAS A UNIQUE PLEA: UNITY.

- a. That is what the Lord prayed for and what the apostles preached.
 - i. John 17:20,21—“I do not pray for these [disciples] alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as you, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.”
 - ii. 1 Cor 1:10—“Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”
- b. But what do we find in the current religious world?
 - i. A whole bunch of churches, all teaching different things, wearing different names, and saying, “This state of division is good!”
 - ii. They say, “It is good that we have so many churches so people can have the church of their choice.”
 - iii. “And it’s good because we all see the Bible differently.”
- c. Folks, in the Old West, when the wagon trains were attacked by Indians, did **any** wagon master ever say, “All right, everybody scatter out far apart from each other—that will be the best way to defend ourselves”?
- d. No! They all formed a tight circle to present a maximum line of defense against the enemy.
- e. The plea of COC’s is, Let us stop being divided; let us all be one in Christ.

10. EIGHTH: THE COC IS UNIQUE IN ITS VIEW OF THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH.

- a. What is the stated Biblical mission of the church?
 - i. Matt 28:18-20—“Go and make disciples of all nations...baptizing them....”
 - ii. Mark 16:16—“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”

- b. You would think that the preaching of the gospel would be the main and only purpose of a church; yet many human churches have departed from this purpose.
- c. They see themselves as:
 - i. Agents for social change, or advocates for human causes like “save the whales” or “global warming.”
 - ii. Glorified political action committees.
 - iii. Sanctuaries for lawbreakers.
 - iv. Public entertainment and recreation centers.
- d. When Jesus went back to heaven, He did **not** say to His disciples, “Go into all the world and form churches to fight hunger and poverty and injustice.”
 - i. Should the church help the poor? Of course. Speak out on moral issues? By all means.
 - ii. But those are not our main work—proclaiming the Lord’s message is.
- e. May this church never be deterred and distracted from its divine mission of evangelism!

11. NINTH: THE WORSHIP OF CHURCHES OF CHRIST IS UNIQUE: IT IS DONE STRICTLY IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE NT PATTERN.

- a. In the Bible record, we see the early congregations engaging in five acts or elements of worship:
 - i. Singing
 - ii. Prayers
 - iii. Teaching and preaching
 - iv. Giving of money for the work of the church
 - v. Taking the Lord’s Supper each first day of the week
- b. You see most of these acts in man-made churches, but they have been changed or added to, and corrupted by elaborate ceremonies and rituals.

- c. You know, it's the height of arrogance to think, "Well, I know God said this is how He wants to be worshipped, but we have some better ideas." (Remember Cain and his offering to God?)
- d. You and I can say of our worship this day, "We have done it exactly as the early Christians did it, and they were under the guidance of the inspired apostles; so we know it is pleasing to God."

12. TENTH: THE COC CONFORMS TO THE BIBLICAL PATTERN IN ITS ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE.

- a. The organization of the Lord's church is simple: Christ is the head, and His people serve Him on earth through local congregations.
 - i. The organizational chart of the church has only two levels: the Lord in heaven and local congregations on earth.
 - ii. There is no in-between structure or level or organization, which is exactly what denominations are.
 - iii. Each local congregation is overseen by elders, served by deacons, taught by preachers, and strengthened by members using their various talents.
- b. Suppose you move to a city where there is no church. How do you start one?
- c. If you are a member of a denomination, you have to call up the church headquarters and get permission, and conform to their requirements.
- d. But you can set up a COC anytime---anywhere---by simply following the Bible pattern found in the NT.
- e. You don't have to call up some COC headquarters (there aren't any) and get permission.

13. SO HERE ARE TEN FACTS THAT MAKE THE COC UNIQUE AND DISTINCTIVE:

- a. You can read its name in your Bible. That cannot be said of any man-made church.

- b. We acknowledge Jesus Christ as our only Head, not some man, woman, or church council.
- c. We understand that Christ founded the church.
- d. We have no creed or authoritative statement of belief except the Bible.
- e. Members of the COC are called simply Christians.
- f. We require Biblical authority for everything we teach and practice.
- g. We plead and pray for unity while others are glorifying division.
- h. We understand that our primary mission is evangelism, not social activism, recreation, etc.
- i. We believe God knew best what pleases Him in worship, and we don't dare add to or change that.
- j. The COC exists solely as local congregations under Christ as head, with no denominational structure or headquarters.

14. SO PLEASE...

- a. If somebody asks you why you are a member of this church, don't say, "Because it is near where I live, I like the preacher, etc."
- b. Those are good and important, but...
- c. Say, "First and foremost, because it is the Lord's church, the one that Christ established; and I can see it in the Bible." --John Temples