

Which **CHURCH** is the True **CHURCH**?



Dean Road **CHURCH OF CHRIST**

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The Distinctive Nature of the Church

Introduction

Why are non-denominational churches rising? Most believers are seeking unity upon the foundation of Jesus Christ. Many are searching for churches that are Christ-centered with the least common denominator. With one church with one head who is Jesus Christ, there is no denominator other than people. Where is the church that Christ built and bought with His blood? This series of messages turns to the Scriptures for the distinctive nature of the church.



Lesson 1: *Distinctives of the Church* (I Corinthians 11:2)

Lesson 2: *The Foundation of the Church* (Ephesians 2:19-22)

Lesson 3: *The Church Are Those in Christ* (Galatians 3:25-28)

Lesson 4: *The Oneness of the Church* (Ephesians 4:1-6)

Distinctives Of The Church

I Corinthians 11:2

Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders, and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.) And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, “Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?” And he said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written,

“This people honors me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me;
in vain do they worship me,
teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”

You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.”

And he said to them, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!

~Mark 7:1-9 (ESV)

Today, many believers prefer non-denominational churches with few distinctions

Maintain the Traditions

Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you”

~I Corinthians 11:1-2 (ESV)

Maintaining God-given traditions is an essential command to the church

“Which church is the true church?”

Received from the Lord

What are **traditions** according to Scripture?

- The Greek verb for tradition means to “hand over, give (over), deliver, give up” (BDAG 148; Gr. *paradidomi*)

Paul presented the Lord’s Supper as a tradition that he “**received from the Lord**” (I Corinthians 11:23)

- The tradition of the Lord’s Supper included, “On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread” (Acts 20:7)

Traditions Taught by the Apostles

Why should Christians **hold to any traditions**?

“To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter”

~II Thessalonians 2:14-15

“Tradition” is not a bad word

Maintain the Traditions

What did Paul mean by “**maintain the traditions** even as I delivered them to you” (I Corinthians 11:1-2)?

- Paul was the means of delivering Christ’s traditions (I Corinthians 11:23)
- Traditions from Christ are not to be changed
- In Context, the traditions include male leadership and the Lord’s Supper (I Corinthians 11:3, 17, 23)

The Traditions of Men

The problem are **the traditions of men**, when people abandon God's commands for man's traditions (Matthew 15:7-9; Mark 7:1-9).

- “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men”

~Mark 7:6-7 (cf. Isaiah 29:13).

Jesus declared, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!” (Mark 7:9)

The New Testament Church

What are some **distinct traditions of the New Testament church** from churches today?

1. **Communion** was the breaking of the bread as Jesus delivered in the assembly (I Corinthians 11:23; cf. Acts 20:7).
2. **Baptism** was immediate, a burial in water for repentant believers into the forgiveness of sins and the moment of salvation (Acts 2:38; Colossians 2:12-13; I Peter 3:21).
3. **Congregational Singing** consisted of one voice with intelligible words (1 Corinthians 14:15; Ephesians 5:19).
4. **The Assembly** was not for displaying gifts in show, but for praising God and for edification and encouragement of the church (I Corinthians 14; Hebrews 2:12; 10:24-25).
5. **Male Leadership** stood in teaching and the like by service and love (I Corinthians 14:33-35; 1 Tim 2:11-14).
6. **Elders** pastored the church (I Timothy 3:1-7; I Peter 5:1-3).
7. **Divorce and Remarriage** was allowed upon one exception of fornication (Matthew 5:32; 19:9).

The Scriptures as the breath of God equips **teaching that completes** the person of God for **every good work** (II Timothy 3:16-17).

Remain a Church of Christ?

- Can a congregation miss something of importance and **remain a church of Christ**?
- **The church of Christ at Corinth had many issues** with wisdom of revelation, sexual immorality, the Lord's Supper, and the resurrection that produced spiritual death (I Corinthians 1; 5-6; 11; 15).
- However, Paul corrected those who **ate meat from idol's temples** and **others who made a show of spiritual gifts in the assembly** without mention of spiritual death (I Corinthians 8; 10; 14).

Today, observing apostolic traditions makes the churches of Christ **extraordinary**.

Maintaining God-given traditions is **a matter of obedience from the heart** to the standard of teaching.

To the Standard of Teaching

“But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness”

~Romans 6:17-18

Christians must **follow Christ to His church** and thus maintain the traditions from Christ.

The most vital tradition of the Christian faith is **the Gospel** of Jesus’s death, burial, and resurrection.

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,”

~I Corinthians 15:3-4

The Foundation Of The Church

Ephesians 2:19-22

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

~Colossians 1:24-28 (ESV)

Jesus asked His disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”

“You Are the Christ”

“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.’”

~Matthew 16:15-16 (NKJV)

“Upon This Rock”

“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give 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.’”

~Matthew 16:17-19 (NKJV) (cf. Matt 18:18; John 20:23)

Jesus did build **His church on the rock** that He is “the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Many people **want a pastor or a pontiff** over the church to explain Jesus and life for them.

However, Jesus is the chief shepherd pastor and the high priest (Hebrews 4:14-16; I Peter 5:4).

Doubt and Deceivers

Maybe so many churches are in disarray because they **doubt their ability to know** God and Christ.

- Many question their ability to be a Christian — to be “good enough” or “perfect.”

Deceivers have taken advantage of this insecurity.

- Jesus warned, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves” (Matthew 7:15).

The Foundation of the Church

What is the essential foundation of the church of Christ according to

Ephesians 2:18–22?

- The church is built on **the foundation** of the apostles and prophets (2:20).
- Christ is **the cornerstone** of the church (2:20).
- The church, God’s people, are joined together to grow into **a holy temple** in the Lord (2:21).
- The church is **dwelling of God** in Spirit (2:22).

Built on the Foundation

How is the church built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Ephesians 3:1-5)?

- Management of **God's grace** was given to Paul to give to believers (Ephesians 3:2).
- Paul gave God's grace **by revelation** of the mystery of Christ — the Gospel (3:3).
- The Ephesian Christians could **perceive Paul's comprehension** of the mystery of Christ (3:4).
- The apostles and prophets revealed the mystery of Christ to that generation (3:5).

“My Disciples”

To what **extent** are the apostles and prophets the foundation of the church?

From the beginning, the church devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42).

Jesus declared, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31).

Devoted

What must such devotion look like?

- **Loving Christ** and keeping His commands (John 14:23-24; cf. Mark 2:27).
- **Living by the Spirit** via the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).
- **Maintaining the unity** of the Spirit in the seven ones (Ephesians 4:1-6).
- **Supplementing faith** with certain qualities of virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love (II Peter 1:5-11).

Essential Foundation

How essential is the foundation of Christ?

“For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ”

~I Corinthians 3:9-11

“Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple”

~I Corinthians 3:16-17

Leaving the foundation of the church brings God's destruction.

God made Christ head over all things to the church.

Over All Things to the Church

“that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all”

~Ephesians 1:20-23 (ESV).

The Church Are Those In Christ

Galatians 3:25-28

and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord,

~Ephesians 3:9-11 (ESV)

Being a member of a community requires certain responsibilities and conditions.

Blessed in Christ

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will”

~Ephesians 1:3-5 (ESV)

Those who are in Christ are blessed with every spiritual blessing.

Not everyone who claims to be a Christian is a Christian.

Baptized into Christ

What observations should readers draw from Galatians 3:23-29?

1. The law acted a guardian to bring people **to faith in Christ** (3:23-25).
2. People become sons and daughters of God **through faith in Jesus Christ** (3:26).
3. Those who are **baptized into Christ** are clothed with Christ (3:27).
4. All are made **one in Christ Jesus** and become heirs of the promise (3:28).

Why Baptize into Christ?

- The apostle taught the law was until the offspring of the promise of life should come (Galatians 3:19-20).
- Paul revealed that a believer becomes a son or daughter of God through faith in Christ by **being baptized in Christ**.
 - Christians become a family through baptism.
- Paul was revealing to the Galatian churches how to be adopted as sons and daughters of God (Galatians 4:1-7).

Baptized into Christ's Death

Those baptized are **baptized into Christ and into His death**.

- “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” (Romans 6:3).
- Baptism is **unity with Christ in His death** to partake of eternal in the resurrection (Romans 6:4-5).
- “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are **in Christ Jesus**” (Romans 8:1, **emp. added**).

“In the Doctrine of Christ”

“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31b-32).

“Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son” (2 John 9).

In or Out of the Church

Where is the dividing line between those in the church and those out of the church?

When is a congregation a church of Christ?

The Lord adds to the church those who are baptized in Jesus's name (Acts 2:41, 47).

The church consists of those walking in God's light (1 John 1:7).

The essential characteristic of the church is faithfully obeying God's commands (Matthew 28:19-20; John 14:23-24).

Baptized into One Body

Baptism is into the body of Christ.

"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit" (I Corinthians 12:12-13).

Those who are **baptized in Christ and abiding in His Word** are the church of Christ.

To be baptized in Christ and into the church is to start a **new life in Christ**.

New Creation in Christ

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation" (II Corinthians 5:17-19).

The church are the new creation

The Oneness Of The Church

Ephesians 4:1-6

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.”

~John 17:17-23 (ESV)

Some people are content to agree to disagree

United in the Same Mind

“I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each one of you says, ‘I follow Paul,’ or ‘I follow Apollos,’ or ‘I follow Cephas,’ or ‘I follow Christ.’ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” (I Corinthians 1:10-13 (ESV).

The church can be united in Christ with the same mind
without any divisions.

Why are there so many churches when people can unite?

The Oneness of the Church

What obvious points should Christians draw from Ephesians 4:1–6?

1. Walking worthy of our calling means that we are humble, gentle, patient, loving, and **eager to maintain unity**.
2. These **seven ones** form the core that unites the church.
3. The Godhead is essential to **the oneness of the church**.
4. One body with **one hope**, **one faith**, and **one baptism** connects the church.

Where Is the Unity?

- Do Christians unite in **one body** as one church?
- Do the faithful unite in **one hope** in the resurrection to eternal life?
- Do the disciples agree in **one faith** as Jesus is the Christ?
- Do Christians unite in **one baptism** that Jesus commanded for salvation?

The Seven Ones & More

These **seven ones along with all the commands of Jesus** and the apostles are not optional.

“If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me” (John 14:23-24; cf. I Corinthians 11:2).

In Accord with Jesus Christ

The unity of the church includes **living in harmony with one another** and **in accord with Jesus Christ**.

“May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 15:5-6 ESV)

The most unifying part of the Christian faith is in accordance with Jesus Christ — His identity and His resurrection.

Jesus was praying for His disciples, the church, on the night before His death.

All Be One

“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:20-21).

As the church, we never give up on maintaining “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”
