**BIBLE TALK Radio Broadcast**

**On KTTR (99.7 FM) Every Sunday at 8:30 a.m.**

**Rolla, Missouri**

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**Will Only Members of the Church of Christ Be Saved?**

The question I want to address this morning is, “Will only members of the church of Christ be saved?” This program is brought to you by the church of Christ who meets at 685 Sidney Street in St. James. You may have heard someone says, “Oh, those in the church of Christ believe they are the only ones who will be saved and go to heaven.” When the average person hears it said that members of the church of Christ think they are the only ones who are right and going to heaven, his first impression is that such a claim is the ultimate in bigotry and narrow-mindedness. “Who do these people think they are to claim superiority over all other denominations?” Unfortunately some people, after hearing such a report will turn away in disgust and will refuse to hear an explanation from those accused. We ask that you not turn away today. We ask that you give us an opportunity to explain our position on this question. Be a Nicodemus who said to his fellow Pharisees who had rejected Jesus, *“Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?”* (John 7:51) I ask that you give me an ear before you judge.

First, we need to make sure that we have the same understanding of our words. Words can have different meanings for different people. For example, a truck driver reports driving his “tractor” 70 mph down the interstate. An old farmer does not believe him because he has never seen a “tractor” travel at 70 mph. The problem is the farmer is unfamiliar with the language of trucking. The truck driver and the farmer have different meanings of the word “tractor.” In John 2:19 Jesus said to the Jews, *“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”*  Verse 21 says that Jesus *“was speaking of the temple of His body,”* but His enemies did not take it this way. They assumed He was speaking of the temple in Jerusalem. They used this as one of the charges against Him when He was before the High Priest (Matt. 26:61).

Therefore, it is important that we have the same understanding of our terms.

Most people assume that we are referring to a denomination by the name “Church of Christ.” Let it be stated as emphatically as possible that if a denomination exists today named “the Church of Christ,” membership in it is in no way essential to salvation. In fact membership in such a denomination would be contributing to division. By the term “church of Christ” we mean something entirely different.

The meaning of the term “church of Christ” is not to be found in a modern encyclopedia, nor in a list of modern churches. Rather it is to be found in the Scriptures. In the Bible the term “church” refers to people. The word is translated from the Greek word *ekklesia*. The Greeks understood this word to mean “a gathering of people, an assembly of people.” It is used this way in Acts 19:39 referring to the lawful assembly of a city in which the people would deliberate the affairs of that city. The Lord used this term to mean His people. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus said, *“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church,*[or ekklesia] *and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”* Jesus said, “I will build My church,” My ekklesia, My people.

The first local group of the Lord’s people was in Jerusalem (Acts 2:37-47). It began when the gospel was preached, when people heard it and obeyed it. They were saved and added to the church by the Lord. Verse 47 says, *“…And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”* This is the first time we read of the Lord’s church being in existence. Saved people, people who were saved by the blood of Christ, were being added to it. When the gospel was preached in Samaria the results were the same. Read Acts 8:5-13. Souls obeyed the gospel that was preached, they were saved by Jesus and were added to the Lord’s church. There was then a new group of saved people in Samaria. This was repeated many times in city after city, always with the same results – another church, another group of saved people. In a few years there were churches in most of the major cities of the world. Wherever there were saved people, they were called the church in that place.

How were these churches designated? Among other things they were called “churches of Christ.” Paul said to the saints in Rome in Romans 16:16, *“…The churches of Christ greet you.”* He was referring to several local groups of saved people. They were called “churches of Christ.” They were called that because the people who composed these assemblies were saved from their sins by Jesus Christ. They now belonged to Christ. They were disciples or followers of Christ. Therefore, they were congregations, or churches of Christ.

And it is also important that we understand that these local assemblies of Christ, or churches of Christ were all alike. We know that they all believed and obeyed one gospel, because the apostles only preached one gospel. In the churches of Galatia there were those who were preaching a different gospel, but Paul makes it clear that there is not another gospel. He says, *“which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.”* (Gal. 1:7-8) Paul makes it clear there was only one gospel. Also disciples of Christ were all to endeavor *“to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.* (Eph. 4:3). He goes on to say in verses 4-6, *“ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”* And so these local churches of Christ were NOT different denominations who preached different gospels, and heeded different faiths, and practiced different baptisms. As a matter of fact, what was taught in one church, the same was taught in another. Paul said to the church in Corinth, *“For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.”* (1 Cor. 4:17) What Paul taught in one church he taught in another church. In other words, these local churches were not different denominations who believed and practiced different things.

And also as the saved in any given community were the church of Christ in that community, so all the saved were in the church in the universal sense. The word “church” in scripture is also used to mean all the saved, universally. In this sense, there was but one church. Jesus called it “My church” in Matthew 16:18. He was talking about all of His saved people. And it is significant that He spoke of His church in the singular as opposed to the plural. It is His body of which Jesus is the head. Paul said in Eph. 1:22-23, *“And He*[God the Father] *put all things under His*[Christ’s] *feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”* The church is the body of Christ and Paul says in chapter 4 and verse 4 of this same book that there is but “one body.” In the first century there was only one church. Christ built only one church. He is the head of one body, one church.

Leaving for the time being the question, does one have to be a member of the church of Christ to be saved, let us ask it another way -- Did one have to be a member of this church that we read about in the Bible in order to be saved? What we find in scripture is that church membership and salvation were synonymous. In scripture, when people were saved the Lord added them to the church (Acts 2:47). Now, if all who were saved were added to Christ’s church, that is exactly the same as saying that only those who were in the church were saved. They were not saved because they were in the church. They were in the church because they were saved. In Acts 20:28, Paul said to the elders of the church in Ephesus, *“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”* Notice, the church was purchased by the blood of Christ. It is said that saved people have been bought at a price (read 1 Cor. 6:19-20). The price that was paid is the blood of Christ. Also the saved have redemption through the blood of Christ (Eph. 1:7). Redemption means to be released from the bondage of sin on the payment of a ransom. The ransom price that was paid is the blood of Christ. Each person who has been saved has been redeemed by the blood of Christ, he has been bought at that price. That is the reason it can be said that Christ purchased the church with His own blood. The church and the redeemed are the same. The church and those purchased by the blood of Christ are the same.

Those who were saved were in one body which is the church. Look with me again in the book of Ephesians. Chapter 2 and verse 16 says that Jew and Gentile were reconciled to God in one body through the cross. In chapter 5 and verse 23 it says that Christ is the Savior of the body. What is the body? It is the church (Eph. 1:22-23). Those who are reconciled to God, those who are saved by Christ are in the body, the church.

Is membership in that church still essential today? Let me ask you, isn’t there still one God today, and He is the God of the Bible? Isn’t there still one Lord Jesus Christ who is the Savior of His body today? Isn’t there still one Spirit, one faith, one baptism, and one body, the one church today? Does not the Lord still add to that one church those who are being saved? We affirm that these things are still true today. God has not changed them. All saved people today have been added to the same church to which the Lord added the saved in the first century – the church that the Lord called “My church.” Those people today who are not in His church are not in it because they are not saved. Therefore, all who are not in the Lord’s church, the church of Christ are lost. They have not obeyed the one gospel. They have not been saved and therefore, the Lord has not added them to His church.

We equally affirm that only members of the church of God are saved; that only members of the house of God are saved. You see, all these, the church of God, the house of God are all scriptural designations of the Lord’s church. We do not mean that one must be a member of a human association or denomination called the “Church of God,” or the “House of God.” No. We would oppose membership in such organizations. Neither do we mean that one must be a member of a human association or denomination called “the Church of Christ.” We would oppose membership in such an organization.

But one must be a member of that body of saved people whom the scriptures designate by these terms.

We who are members of the church of Christ in St. James have obeyed the one gospel and believe that Jesus has saved us and added us to His church. We have not affiliated ourselves with any human organization, nor pledged ourselves to support any human creed or decisions of any assembly of men. Hence, we call ourselves simply Christians, members of Christ’s church. We urge others to do the same. But in urging others to do the same we are making no claim for any organization of our own but only for the body of Christ. We make no boast of salvation to be obtained through fellowship with us. We call upon no one to accept any doctrine or practice of our own, but only to accept the doctrine and practice found in scripture.

If you are interested in learning more, please give us a call. You may call us at 573-263-4690.