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Why I Am a Member of the Church of Christ

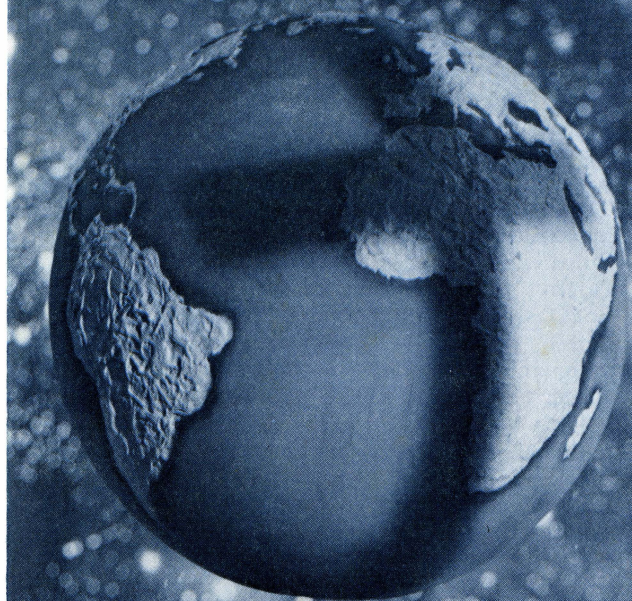
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*Why I Am a Member
of the #687
Church of Christ*

by GEORGE W. BAILEY

I'd like to begin our lesson today by calling your attention to this passage: "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (I Peter 3:15). If one cannot turn to the Bible and find a "thus saith the Lord" for that which he does religiously, then he is not able to give an answer to those who might ask a reason for the hope he has. Doesn't the Lord admonish us to "prove all things; hold fast that which is good"? (I Thessalonians 5:21). Doesn't the Bible say, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves"? (II Corinthians 13:5).

Have you ever stopped to ask yourself why you are a member of a certain church? Can you give a Bible reason for the faith you hold? If not, are you sure you have proved all things and are holding fast that which is good? Didn't the Lord say, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world"? (I John 4:1). Unless we constantly examine ourselves to see whether or not we be in the faith, isn't it possible that in the final day we might be surprised to learn that we were following false teaching? The Bible says, "Many false prophets are gone out into the world."

3 Our blessed Lord once declared, "Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch" (Matthew 15:13, 14). Then too, "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it" (Psalms 127:1). We should constantly search the scriptures that we might know for sure whether or not we are a part of the house the Lord Himself built. The scripture says, "But Christ as a Son over His own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end" (Hebrews 3:6). Christ does have a house, "whose house are we," but notice this condition, "if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." The only way we can be assured of being the Lord's house is "if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope unto the end."

7 From whence does this confidence come? What is the basis of this rejoicing of hope? Confidence and hope come from faith in God (Hebrews 11:1). This faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17).

5 The way we can give an answer to those who ask for a reason of the hope that is within us is to let everything we do religiously be governed by God's Word. Being a member of a certain church just because parents, relatives, or friends are members of that particular church is not within itself a legitimate and sufficient reason. We must have Biblical authority for that which we do religiously. That being the case, will you permit me to let you know why I am a member of the church of Christ? Since I cannot speak for others, you will understand why it is necessary to make use of the first person.

I AM A MEMBER OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST BECAUSE OF WHAT IT IS CALLED

In the New Testament we find such expressions as "the church" (Acts 8:1); "the church of God" (I Corinthians 1:2; I Timothy 3:5); "the church of the living God" (I Timothy 3:15); "the church of the Lord" (Acts 20:28); "the church of the first-born" (Hebrews 12:23); "the churches of Christ" (Romans 16:16).

7 It was Christ who built the church, and He called it His (Matthew 16:18). He is the head of the church, and the Saviour of the body (Ephesians 5:23). He is the head of the body, the church (Colossians 1:18). In Colossians 1:24 we find this expression, "For the body's sake, which is the church." Since the church belongs to Christ, shouldn't the church be so-called? It is certainly scriptural to refer to the Lord's body as "the church of Christ." It is because of this scriptural designation that I am a member of the church of Christ. ✓

I AM A MEMBER OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST BECAUSE OF WHAT ITS MEMBERS ARE CALLED

In the New Testament, followers of Christ are called saints (I Corinthians 1:2); disciples (Acts 20:7); brethren (I Corinthians 15:6); children of God (I John 3:1); sons of God (Romans 8:14); Christians (Acts 11:26; 26:28).

9 Surely it would be permissible to refer to followers of Christ as "saints," "disciples," "brethren," "children of God," "sons of God," "Christians"—for all of these expressions are found in the New Testament. In Isaiah 62:2, God said that He would later call His people by a new name which the mouth of the Lord would name. No doubt that name was the name "Christian." It is in this name that we can glorify God (I Peter 4:16). But some claim there is nothing in a name and that it doesn't matter what one is called religiously. If that is the case, then why did the Lord say to glorify God in this name, or on this behalf, referring to the name Christian? (I Peter 4:16). Concerning Christ, the Bible says, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none

other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). There must be something in a name. Religiously, we should wear only that name which would honor our Lord. The Bible doesn't speak of "hyphenated" Christians, or of this brand or that brand of Christian, but just "Christian." Members of the church call themselves "Christians," and for this reason I am a member of it.

I AM A MEMBER OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST BECAUSE OF ITS CREED

The church of Christ has no written creed other than the Bible itself. What authority would we have to draw up some creed or dogmas of faith and bind ourselves to the same, when in God's Word we have all that pertains unto life and godliness? (II Peter 1:3). Isn't that sufficient? What would be the purpose of a church manual or creed book? If a creed contains more than the Bible, it contains too much. If it contains less than the Bible, it contains too little. If it contains just the Bible, why have it? Why not take just the Bible itself? Didn't Paul tell Timothy to charge some that they teach no other doctrine? (I Timothy 1:3). Didn't Paul say to Titus, "Speak thou the things which become sound doctrine"? (Titus 2:1). Didn't the Holy Spirit through Peter declare, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God"? (I Peter 4:11).

Notice very carefully this teaching of the Lord, "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son" (II John 9). If we would simply take the one doctrine of Christ and be governed thereby, we would not have a multiplicity of churches today. Creeds divide, but the doctrine of Christ unites! The church of Christ is pleading for a return to the doctrine of Christ and for the giving up of human creeds.

Suppose someone in a distant land, who had never heard of any of the various churches now existing, decided to take his Bible and through following it endeavored to reproduce in that land a church that was as near the New Testament pattern as he could find. What would he call that church? By what creed would that church be governed? Would that church be a reproduction of one of the present denominational bodies? Definitely not! It takes a certain creed to produce a certain church. If one would but follow the teachings of Christ and completely divorce himself from the influence of any denominational creed, that which would result would be the Lord's church. This is exactly what has happened in several places of the world. There have been those in times past who knew nothing at all of the churches of Christ in America, but who took their Bibles and sought to do Bible things in Bible ways and call Bible things by Bible names, and there

resulted congregations wearing the same name and practicing the same thing as the churches of Christ in our land. How do you account for this? Had we been following some creed other than the New Testament, such could not have resulted. It is for this reason, too, that I today am a member of the church of Christ.

I AM A MEMBER OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST BECAUSE OF ITS ORGANIZATION

3 The churches of Christ have no headquarters on earth. Each congregation is autonomous, and no congregation is over or dictates to another congregation. Each congregation selects its own elders to oversee the flock as is suggested in Acts 14:23. These elders are called "bishops" (Titus 1:5, 7), "overseers" (Acts 20:28), "stewards" (Titus 1:7), "pastors" (Ephesians 4:11) or "the presbytery" (I Timothy 4:14).

The qualifications for elders or bishops are very clearly outlined in I Timothy 3, Titus 1, I Peter 5, Acts 20. Deacons likewise are selected by each congregation, and their qualifications are very clearly set forth in I Timothy 3 and Acts 6. Elders are to oversee the work of the local congregation, and deacons are to help in a special way, both of whom are to be selected by the local congregation. This is what was done in New Testament times. Incidentally, this is the only organization we find in the New Testament church. In the writing of the Philippian letter Paul addressed it to "the saints in Christ Jesus . . . with the bishops and deacons" (Philippians 1:1).

5 There is no authority for one elder or bishop being over other elders or bishops, nor for one congregation to be over another congregation. Peter tells us that an elder should not "lord it over God's heritage" (I Peter 5:3). Placing one bishop over other bishops is a departure from the New Testament pattern. The same is true when one congregation is placed over other congregations. We must respect the organization that God has set up, and because the church of Christ does respect that organization, I today am a member of it.

I AM A MEMBER OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST BECAUSE OF ITS WORSHIP

✓ The Bible tells us that upon the first day of the week the disciples came together to break bread (Acts 20:7). Since the Lord said that the Lord's Supper was observed upon the first day of the week, we gather that this was a weekly affair. If not, why was mention made of the day of the week? Had the Lord told us that the disciples met upon a certain day of the month, we would have gathered that it was a monthly affair. All evidence is that it was observed on the first day of every week. What

authority do people have for observing the Lord's Supper four times a year, or two times a year? Churches of Christ observe the Lord's Supper on the first day of every week because of this teaching in Acts 20:7.

17 Furthermore, upon the first day of the week we contribute of our means as was done in I Corinthians 16:1, 2. We have no bazaars, pie suppers, rummage sales, etc., but we advocate that each contribute according to his ability his freewill offerings unto the Lord.

Then, too, we have no mechanical instruments of music in our worship, simply because the New Testament does not authorize the use of such. Every passage in the New Testament dealing with music in worship specified "singing." Had the Lord given a general command to offer music, then any kind of music would be all right, but since He specified "singing," then we have no right to add something to God's arrangement. For several centuries after the church had been established there were no mechanical instruments of music used in Christian worship. All recognized historians tell us that instruments were not used in the worship until the fifth or sixth century. Why? It wasn't because they had no mechanical instruments of music, but it was because the Lord had specified a certain kind of music. Because of the way the church of Christ adheres to the New Testament order of worship, I am a member of it.

I AM A MEMBER OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST BECAUSE OF ITS TEACHING ON HOW TO BECOME A CHRISTIAN

19 The scripture says, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8, 9). What is meant by the expression, "not of works, lest any man should boast"? Does this mean that no action at all is required on man's part? No, "for by grace are ye saved, through faith." Isn't faith an action on man's part? Yes. Doesn't the Bible say that faith is a work? (John 6:29). Yes, but it is the work of God. What does the Bible mean then when it says, "not of works"?

Furthermore, how can you harmonize this passage with James 2:24: "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only"? Beloved, it is not by the works of man's own righteousness, but by the works of God's righteousness that one is saved. "In every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:35). Faith is a work of God's righteousness. What about repentance? Doesn't God demand men to repent? (Acts 17:30). Is repentance a work of man's own righteousness, or a part of God's righteousness? What about baptism? Doesn't the Bible tell us that baptism saves us? (I Peter 3:21). Isn't it through

baptism that we put on Christ? (Galatians 3:27). Doesn't the Bible teach us that we cannot walk in the newness of life until we have been buried and raised with our Lord in baptism? (Romans 6:4). Isn't this therefore a definite part of the new birth? (John 3:5).

Jesus very plainly tells us that baptism is a part of God's righteousness (Matthew 3:15). When one is scripturally baptized he is not, by his own works or merit, earning salvation, but he is simply submitting to the work of God's righteousness. This is the arrangement of God's grace!

There is no example in the New Testament of an infant being baptized or christened. Infants do not need to be baptized, for the Lord said, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." We do not believe in infant membership, simply because the New Testament does not teach it. There is no example of anyone being voted into the church. Salvation is offered to all. God adds to the church those who are saved (Acts 2:47). We believe that one must be a member of the Lord's church in order to be saved. It is by one Spirit that we are all baptized into that one body (I Corinthians 12:13).

There are many other reasons that could be given, but time would not permit. I do submit the following for your consideration and evaluation—because of what the church of Christ is called, because of what its members are called, because of its creed, its organization, its worship and its teachings on how to become a Christian. These are some of the reasons why I today am a member of the church of Christ. I invite you, after a careful study of these things, to take your stand with us, on the Bible alone and thereby help us to restore the New Testament church.



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George W. Bailey, nationally known speaker on the Herald of Truth radio program, has been minister with the College Church of Christ in Abilene, Tex., for 10 years.

A popular speaker in evangelistic meetings and on college lectureship programs, Bailey has traveled extensively, both in the United States and in foreign countries, in the interest of spreading the gospel.

Among other areas, his travels have taken him behind the Iron Curtain into Russia and Poland, throughout Europe and Africa, and to Australia and the Far East. He has been the speaker in evangelistic campaigns in Scotland and Australia in recent years.

This sermon was first delivered by Bailey over the Herald of Truth broadcast March 28, 1965. It was carried over ABC and Mutual network affiliates and by 238 independent radio stations.