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Churches of Christ salute **†** you



A PECULIAR PEOPLE

HERALD OF TRUTH

A Peculiar People

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If by a miracle you should be picked up and carried back through time some 1900 years and found yourself in the midst of a congregation of the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, what would be your reaction? Apart from their customs, their dress and their language, would you feel at home or would you feel that you were among an unusual group of people, different from the religious standard to which you are accustomed?

Unfortunately I am persuaded that a vast majority of the religious people of the United States would feel completely out of place and would view the faith, practice and teaching of the Christians described in the New Testament as something peculiar or unusual!

Let us by faith be whisked through the halls of time and become acquainted with the church as it was originally established by Jesus. Many of my friends and neighbors would first of all be concerned because they would see in the hands of the Christians of the first century no written creed or man-devised confession of faith. Instead of the manuals, disciplines, prayer-books, catechisms, articles of faith and by-laws of man which are the rule of today, there would be in the hands of the Christians the word of God.

These followers of Christ would be searching diligently the prophecies of the Old Testament to prove that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. Luke wrote in Acts the seventeenth chapter concerning the people of Berea, "Now these were more noble than those in Thessalica, in that they received the word with all the readiness of mind, examining the scriptures daily, whether these things were so." These Christians not only searched the scriptures of the Old Testament for these proofs, but also learned of God's goodness and severity of which Paul speaks in Romans the eleventh chapter.

They examined the inspired epistles of Peter and Paul, James, Jude, and John, along with the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, so that they might be thoroughly prepared for every good work. The apostle Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness; that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work." Mosheim, that outstanding church historian, said, "The whole of the Christian religion is comprehended in two great points, of which the first regards what we are to believe, and the other relates to our conduct and actions: or, to express the matter more briefly, the gospel presents to us objects of faith and rules of practice. The rule of standard of both are those books which contain the Revelation that God made of his will to persons chosen for that purpose whether before or after the birth of Christ. And these divine books are usually called *The Old and New Testament*."

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"The apostles and their disciples took all possible care, and that in the earliest times of the church, that these sacred books might be in the hands of all Christians, that they might be read and explained in the assemblies of the faithful, and thus contribute, both in private and in public, to excite and nourish in the minds of Christians a fervent zeal for the truth, and a firm attachment to the ways of piety and virtue." (Mosheim's *Ecclesiastical History*, Volume 1, Chapter 3, paragraph 1, 2).

Yet the apostles went even further. They demanded that the word of God be the only basis of authority. Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:15-16, "Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth. But shun profane babblings; for they proceed further in ungodliness."

John even further warned in 2 John 9:10, "Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son. If any one cometh unto you, and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not into your house, and give him no greeting."

Would you not then, my friends, feel out of place with all of your books of man as you walked among men who were armed only with the Word of God which Paul calls the sword of the Spirit?

Many also would become quite disturbed when they found that these people had no earthly headquarters and no earthly hierarchy, no earthly organization of any kind other than the individual congregations as they zealously went about their mission. It is hard for people of the twentieth century to comprehend this one simple fact: that in the church established by Jesus Christ there were no synods, councils, conventions, associations, societies, or conferences composed of delegates from different congregations, creating a religious, legislative body.

Mosheim said, "The churches, in those ancient times, were entirely independent; none of them subject to any foreign jurisdiction, but each one governed by its own rulers and its own laws." (Mosheim's *Ecclesiastical History*, Volume 1, Chapter 2, Paragraph 14). Another outstanding historian, Neander, corroborates this in Volume 1, Page 183.

The apostle Paul told Titus, "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that were wanting, and appoint elders in every city, as I gave thee charge;" (Titus 1:5) and Luke speaks concerning Paul and Barnabas in Acts 14:23, "And when they had appointed for them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they had believed."

The congregations established by the Son of God were led by men who had met the qualifications laid down by the inspired writers. These men were called bishops, presbyters, pastors, or elders.

While there was no earthly headquarters, it should not be assumed for one moment that the many hundreds and thousands of congregations were not united under one head, for the church of the New Testament was completely imperial-

istic in that Jesus was complete ruler, being "the King of kings and Lord of lords."

Jesus himself said in Matthew 28:18, "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth." No room was left for authority on the part of any man. Paul said in I Tim. 6:13-15, that Christ shall appear to show "who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords."

Paul also said concerning God and Christ in Ephesians 1:20-23, "Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come, and he put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."

However paradoxical it may seem, while the church of the New Testament was imperialistic with Jesus as King, it was also completely democratic in that all men were brethren and that all men stood with equal rights before the King.

The apostle Paul inspired by the Holy Spirit said in Galatians 3:26-28, "For ye are all sons of God, through faith, in Christ, Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ. There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free there can be no male and female, for ye all are one man in Christ Jesus."

Mosheim said, "There reigned among the members of the Christian Church, however distinguished they were by worldly rank and title, not only an amiable harmony, but also a perfect equality. . . . Whoever acknowledged Christ as the Savior of mankind, and made a solemn profession of his confidence in him, was immediately baptized and received into the church." (Mosheim's Ecclesiastical History, Volume 1, Chapter 2, Paragraph 7) Even those who served as bishops of the congregations were commanded by the apostle Peter in I Peter 5:2-3, "Tend the flock of God which is among you, exercising the oversight, not of constraint, but willingly, according to the will of God; nor yet for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind. Neither as lording it over the charge allotted to you, but making yourselves examples to the flock."

Another factor that we would find as unusual is the fact that instead of 250 denominations and sects there was only one church, that which was built by Jesus. Christ had prophesied in Matthew 16, "Upon this rock I will build my church," and Paul in speaking to the elders of the church in Ephesus as recorded in Acts 20:28, said that there was one church of the Lord which he purchased with His own blood. He further said of Christ in Colossians 1:18, "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." Concerning this, he stated in Ephesians 4:4, "there is one body," and again in Ephesians 2:16 he implicitly states that both Jew and Gentile are reconciled in one body unto God through the cross."

When members of the church in Corinth began to digress and to divide, Paul said, "Now I beseech you, brethren, through

the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment. Now this I mean, that each one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you: or were ye baptized into the name of Paul?" (I Cor. 1:10-12-13). For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you jealousy and strife, are ye not carnal, and do ye not walk after the manner of men? For when one saith, I am of Paul: and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not men?" (I Cor 3:3-4).

Not only was the church established by Jesus Christ, united in its practice, but they glorified the name of Christ in that they were nothing more than Christians. Luke records in the eleventh chapter of Acts, the 26th verse, that the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. The apostle Peter exhorted in I Peter 4:16, "But if a man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God in this name."

The church did not wear the name of man, but the church was referred to as the Church, the Church of God, the Church of the Lord, the Church of the First Born, and in Romans 16:16, speaking about a number of congregations, the apostle Paul said, "The Churches of Christ salute you."

Many others would think the church found in the New Testament unusual in that the teaching of Christ, the apostles and its members was that to obtain forgiveness of sins one must not only believe, but also repent, confess his faith in Jesus as the Son of God, and be buried in water for the remission of sins. The writer of Hebrews said in Hebrews 11:6, "and without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that seek after him." Paul said in Acts 17:30, "The times of ignorance therefore God overlooked; but now he commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent." Paul again wrote in Romans 10:10, "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." And in Mark 16:16, the Lord said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned."

These penitent, baptized believers did not join any organization but were added by the Lord Himself to His Church. Luke records in Acts the second chapter, the 41st and 47th verses, "They then, that received his word were baptized; and there were added unto them in that day about three thousands souls. . . . And the Lord added to them day by day those that were saved."

Paul also said in Galatians 3:26-27, "For ye are all sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ." For many today it would be unusual to hear preached from their pulpits the New Testament truth that for one to be saved he must be in the church and for one to be in the church he must have the the remission of past sins.

It would also be unusual for many should they watch the baptism of these Christians decried in the New Testament to

find that it was an immersion in water. Paul refers in Romans the sixth chapter to it as a burial. Mosheim states, "The sacrament of baptism was administered in this century, without the public assemblies, in places appointed and prepared for that purpose, and was performed by immersion of the whole body in the baptismal font." (Mosheim's Ecclesiastical History, Volume 1, Chapter 4, Paragraph 8).

Some few religious Americans would find it uncommon for the church to meet upon the first day of each week for public worship. In Acts 20:7, Luke records. And upon the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread Paul discoursed with them, intending to depart on the morrow; and prolonged his speech until midnight." Mosheim states, "All Christians were unanimous in setting apart the first day of the week, on which the triumphant Savior arose from the dead, for the solemn celebration of public worship." (Mosheim's Ecclesiastical History, Volume 1, Chapter 4, Paragraph 4).

In their worship on the first day of the week they prayed even as Paul commanded in 1 Tim. 2:8, "I desire therefore that the men pray in every place, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and disputing." They lifted their voices in song without the use of instruments as also commanded by Paul in Ephesians 5:19: "Speaking one to another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord." Joseph Bingham, the well known author of "Antiquities of the Christian Church" and said to be one of the most learned men the Church of England has ever produced says: "Music in churches is as ancient as the apostles, but instrumental music not so." (Works Vol. 3, p. 137). The American Encyclopedia presents this fact: "Pope Vitalian is related to have first introduced organs into some of the churches of Western Europe, about 670; but the earliest trustworthy account is that of the one sent as a present by the Greek emperor Constantine Copronymus to Pepin, king of the Franks, in 755." (Vol. 12 p. 688).

In these assemblies of public worship the scriptures were read and studied, of which Mosheim says, "In these assemblies the holy Scriptures were publicly read, and for that purpose were divided into certain portions or lessons. This part of divine service was followed by a brief exhortation to the people, in which eloquence and art gave place to the natural and fervent expression of zeal and charity." (Mosheim's Ecclesiastical History, Volume 1, Chapter 4, Paragraph 6).

Many also would find it unusual to observe these early Christians taking of the Lord's Supper at their period of public worship on the first day of every week, of which we read a moment ago in Acts 20:7.

Others would be troubled to find that the work of the church and the needs of the poor were cared for by the contributions of the Christians as they gave according to their prosperity. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 16:2, "Upon the first day of the week let each one of you lay by him in store, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come." Mosheim says, "Every Christian, who was in an opulent condition, and indeed every one, according to their circumstances, brought with them their gifts, and offered them, as it were, unto

the Lord." (Mosheim's Ecclesiastical History, Chapter 4, Paragraph 7).

As you have walked through the pages of the New Testament and the annals of history have you found these people uncommon from your religious standards? If the church of which we have spoken today and the people of which we have read have seemed to be peculiar, it indicates but one thing: that you are not a part of the church established by the Lord Jesus.

God, His way, His law, His church have not changed, but they are the same today as they were 1900 years ago. James said of God in James 1:17. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning." The writer of Hebrews said of Christ in Hebrews 13:8, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yea and forever."

There are over 10,000 congregations today just as those we find described by the New Testament. These congregations are made up of men and women who are as Peter described in 1 Peter 2:9, "But ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession", "a peculiar people". Not peculiar in dress except in modesty; not peculiar in speech except in purity; but peculiar in the sense that they are set apart, worshipping, preaching, living, not by customs or dress or speech of Christians 1900 years ago, but worshipping, preaching and living according to the commands of the Lord Jesus Christ. They are striving to be nothing more than Christians, members of the church which He built and purchased with His blood.

They have heard and believed the words of Paul when he heaven, should preach unto you any gospel than that which wrote in Galatians 1:8, "But though we, or an angel from we preached unto you, let him be anathema." Will you not today, my friends, search out these peculiar people and become a member of the church which Jesus built, nothing more and nothing less than New Testament Christians?

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