

6. Who is to interpret the New Testament?

It is the duty of each Christian to seek to know the will of God by the study of the New Testament according to his ability and opportunity, with prayer, and to use every legitimate means to come to a correct understanding of the Scriptures. No formulated creed is accepted as an authoritative interpretation of the New Testament, and no ecclesiastical body is empowered to give such an interpretation.

7. What must an individual believe before being accepted into the church?

The foundation belief is that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Before an individual receives baptism, he must accept this basic truth and thus commit himself to a life of trust and obedience of Jesus as Lord.

8. What besides this belief is required before baptism?

Besides believing that Jesus is the son of God, the individual must turn from a life of pleasing self to one of serving the Lord Jesus; from a life that is self-centred to a life that is Christ-centred. This change of outlook is called repentance and is necessary if belief in the form of an intellectual assent is to grow into a personal trust in Jesus as Lord. By the very nature of things, it is evident that both belief and repentance must come before we can set out on any full Christian life.

9. What difference does baptism make?

Baptism is appointed by God as a means of bestowing divine blessing. As the penitent believer comes to baptism, he is aware of his own sin and need, and comes to receive God's forgiveness and renewing grace. We can see the fitness of the act of immersion in water, for it is a washing and also a burial and rising again. The washing speaks of God's cleansing from sin; the burial and rising again marks the end of the old life and the beginning of the new life in Christ.

10. What form should baptism take?

True Christian baptism is the immersion of the penitent believer in water. The word "to baptize" does itself properly mean "to dip". Paul spoke of baptism as a burial and this clearly indicates its form. All the other references in the New Testament to the manner of baptism show that baptism was immersion and from the historical point of view there can be no doubt about the form of baptism in New Testament times. The symbolism of baptism also indicates its form, for at baptism the candidate, as he is immersed in water, identifies himself with his Lord in His death, burial and resurrection.

11. What is the position of one who has already received infant baptism?

While infant baptism may be administered with the best of intentions, it cannot be admitted to be the one baptism, since the one who received infant baptism could not have been in the right state to receive it. The one baptism is for penitent believers only, and, furthermore, infant baptism, as it is commonly administered, is not "baptism" (that is, immersion) at all, so far as the act is concerned. For any who have received infant baptism and wish to obey Jesus as Lord and work for the unity of His followers, the right course to take is to receive the baptism.

12. What is involved in church membership?

A member of the church has the responsibility to live the Christian life, with the help of God, both as an individual having a personal and direct allegiance to his Lord and as a worker with others in a local congregation or church, and also as a member of the universal church. The member has responsibilities also in the service of his Lord in a very personal way as, for example, in daily work and private devotions. In the work of the local church he is called to serve according to ability, and in Christian work everywhere to be concerned for the progress of the Gospel.

13. Is there a priesthood in the church?

Certainly! Every member of the Lord's church is a priest. In the New Testament all members of the church are spoken of as "a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifice acceptable to God by Jesus Christ". A priest is one who has special privileges of access to God and so can approach Him on behalf of others. Each member of the church has the privilege of access to God through the one High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ.

14. Are there ministers in the church?

A minister is a servant. All members of the church are saved to serve, each member should, therefore take a proper part in the ministry or service of the church, according to ability. In this sense all are ministers. There are, however, special ministries in the church, such as the guiding and ruling of the local church, teaching, etc., and some are called upon by God and the church to guide and oversee the work of the congregation as elders or bishops, some to serve as teachers, etc.

15. To what authority is the local church subject?

The local church is subject to the Lord Jesus Christ as the Head of the church, and should have its own elders or bishops to guide and oversee its work. These elders are assisted in their work by deacons. There are no other ecclesiastical authorities which control the activities of the local church.

16. Are there any other ordinances of the church besides baptism?

Yes. Since an ordinance is "something that is ordained or appointed", all things that are ordained or appointed for the use of the church are ordinances. Prayer is an ordinance, for example, there is, however, one other ordinance besides baptism which has a special bearing on the question of Christian union, and that is the Lord's Supper. As in the case of baptism, churches of Christ seek to restore this ordinance to the position indicated by Jesus and His Apostles.

17. How is the Lord's Supper celebrated?

The Lord's Supper (which is a communion) is the central service of the church, each week. Each Lord's Day the local church meets to remember the Lord in this way. All who have received the one baptism, and continue to live as members of the church, are invited to take the emblems of the body and blood of the Lord and thus show the Lord's death and feed spiritually on Him. The call of the Lord Himself to remember Him and the need for spiritual strength both indicate the importance of regularly attending the Lord's Supper, week by week.

TWENTY QUESTIONS ON
CHURCHES OF CHRIST

18. How is the local church financed?

It is the duty and privilege of each member to contribute to the church funds according to ability. This contribution is normally made each week when the church meets to celebrate the Lord's Supper. The ministry of the church is largely carried out by those who earn their living by other work. It is, however, a Scriptural principle that the labourer is worthy of his hire and those who are engaged full-time in the work of the church are supported from church funds.

19. What attitude is taken towards the Bible?

The Bible is accepted as the Word of God. By that is meant that God speaks to us through the Bible and that we can learn from the Bible what is the will of God for us. The Bible must be studied with proper care and attention and, like every other book, its true meaning is obtained when it is studied in the light of the circumstances in which it was written.

20. Why is the term "churches of Christ" used?

Local churches are called churches of Christ in no superior sense, but simply because this Scriptural term fittingly describes local congregations which endeavour to work according to the will of Christ. Party names have been deliberately discarded, because it is only when sectarian names and the sectarian spirit are set aside that the unity will be achieved for which Jesus prayed.

Albert E. Winstanley [Evangelist]

NOTES:-

This leaflet has been retyped by Rose M. Payne, and republished by "Simply Christians - Longford " Minor amendments have been made with the author's permission.
Simply Christians - Longford CHARITY No. 1056018 is a work of a church of Christ meeting in:
The Green Hut, Stretford, Manchester, UK

1. What is the Plea of churches of Christ?

Churches of Christ plead for the unity of all Christians by a restoration of Christianity as revealed in the New Testament.

There are two parts to this plea. First, there is a call to all who would follow the Lord Jesus Christ to be united; and, then the way in which this unity may be achieved is indicated by a return to the Christianity of the New Testament. Jesus prayed for His disciples "that they all may be one". The Churches of Christ seek to work for the fulfillment of this prayer of Jesus by following the way that Jesus and His Apostles taught.

2. Is the unity of Christians possible?

Since Jesus prayed that all His followers may be one, it is clearly the Lord's will that His church should be united. We can safely conclude that He has provided all that is necessary to achieve that oneness. A united church is not just an ideal which requires each Christian to be perfect before it can be achieved. In New Testament times, there was a oneness in the church in spite of very evident human imperfections. So today the unity of Christians is possible.

3. Will there not always be differences of opinions amongst Christians?

So long as we live in this world there will be genuine differences of opinion amongst the followers of Christ. But there is ample room for such differences, provided that all keep those essentials which make for unity within the church of Christ. The desired oneness can be as much prejudiced by insisting on the acceptance of the opinions of men as by departing from essentials. Liberty and loyalty are both needed, liberty of opinion and loyalty to the principles of the faith.

4. What are the essentials of unity?

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Church at Ephesus about those essentials saying: "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and one Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all". Unity comes because there is one body of which all are members, one spirit, who dwells in all; one hope, which all cherish; one Lord, whom all obey; one faith, which all believe; one baptism, which all have received; and one God, who is Father of all.

5. What is the authoritative statement of doctrine?

Since the unity of Christians is to be obtained by a restoration of Christianity as revealed in the New Testament, the authoritative statement of doctrine is to be found in the New Testament itself. Only the teaching of Christ and His Apostles, as preserved for us in the New Testament, is to be regarded as being the one faith.