



Front Cover

Let me tell you about ... Jesus & His Church

Two of the most important truths of all time ... two truths so big that my mind is unable to hold them both at the same time. Truth number one: Jesus is God ... He has all the power of the supreme being ... is in fact the one through whom all things were created. Truth number two: Jesus once lived on this earth as a human being. I can think about one or I can think about the other ... but simultaneously—God—and—man is so far outside the borders of my human experience that it escapes me. Or perhaps ... it captures me.

The most important event of human history is the earthly life of Jesus of Nazareth. All the nations ... all the leaders ... all the turning points that history students learn ... must fall below the life of Jesus on the List of Significant Events. No matter how important other events were, their impacts were limited by the boundary of death. But Jesus' life has implications for me which will continue even beyond the end of my earthly life.

Jesus came and lived on the earth so that I could begin to understand what God is like and what He has done for me. In fact, He came to show me just that ... that God really is for me! That's why Jesus is truly good news.

Without God, I was drowning in ungodliness ... punishing myself with loneliness, anger, depression, and all the other repulsive results of self-centeredness. The life of Jesus gave me my first real chance to escape from my destructive life of sin. When I saw how Jesus lived and loved, it first made me ashamed of myself ... and then it gave me a ray of hope ... that my life could be better.

His life made me want to be like Him ... His death and resurrection made it possible. The Bible's eyewitness accounts of how He dealt with people left me amazed at his compassion for people who had lost their way in sin. I listened to the stories of His forgiveness of sin and how He gave people power to live new lives. I watched with wonder each time He overcame evil—correcting that evil with care and concern motivated by love. I

wanted desperately to be like Him ... but my sin bound me with guilt and was no doubt heading me toward eternal death. I had despaired that life could hold joy and happiness.

But then ... at the crossroads of all time ... Jesus removed the power of death over me. He died as the sacrifice for my sin. He was buried in a tomb. But he broke the power of sin and death and returned to life. And ... he promised to give me and all who believed the same power over sin and death ... if I would believe in Him and give my life to Him.

I gave my life to him gladly ... it was no good to me without Him. I was sick of sin. I confessed that He is the Son of God ... the only one with the power to change me. I rejected my previous plan to live for myself and I was buried in water ... as He died and was buried. And I came out of that watery grave as a forgiven person ... a brand new person with a new reason to live. So, the life that I now live is not really me – it is Jesus living in me. I still live in my body, but I live by faith in Jesus, the Son of God ... who loved me and gave His life to save me.

Before He left the earth, Jesus established the support group He knew I would need. In His divine wisdom, He established his church as a fellowship of those ... like me ... who are being saved by their belief in Him. He knows the fragile nature of my faith ... and the awesome power of life's temptations. So He gives me a world-wide network of brothers and sisters in His love ... a church family to support my new life in Him. He wants me to grow strong.

If you've got a few minutes ... I'd like to tell you about my church family. It's a relationship that is making all the differences in my life as I seek to follow Jesus. The church supports me now that God has changed me from a sinner with no hope ... to a forgiven sinner with the hope of spending eternity in the presence of God. If that's something that interests you ... then, we'll both be glad we had this talk. If not ... well, I'll enjoy telling you about it anyway.

The church that Jesus established meets all of my needs. In fact, I like to think of where I worship and preach as my family. Everyone needs a place where they can know they will be loved unconditionally, accepted totally and forgiven completely. I have

found this bond in my church family ... in a local church of Christ. I suppose it's just natural for me to want to share my family with anyone I can. I'm proud of it and so thankful for it.

From what I know about history, I get the feeling that Jesus established His church and then, through the centuries, we humans let it slide into something altogether different. Those first Christians shared a common faith in Jesus Christ, a common gratitude for the salvation Jesus had given them, and a common love and concern for each other. They were neither Catholic, Protestant, nor Jewish ... but simply the church that belonged to Jesus.

In the first century, the word church referred to a group of Christians. That was before the word church came to describe religious buildings and organizational structures. Church meant simply those called out of the world by their faith in Jesus Christ, and transformed into brothers and sisters in the family of God.

Today, it's still true: Christ's church results when men and women come to Him as Savior and want Him to be their Lord. When people hear that Jesus died for their sins and they turn to Him in a faith that obeys—then the church is the natural result. God keeps on adding people to the church every day who turn away from sin to Jesus and are immersed into His death.

Time after time, I see proofs that Jesus knew exactly what He was doing when He designed the church. He created a simple structure for spreading the good news and nurturing those who would believe. His church was designed to meet normal human needs for wholeness, love, and togetherness ... needs that are just as essential in my world and they were in the world of Peter and Paul. The church has shown love to me and to those close to me. I've watched my brothers and sisters seek to feed the hungry, comfort the grieving, care for the sick, counsel broken hearts, provide for orphans, reassure the widowed, champion the poor, and bring the good news of Jesus to those on the outside. These goals are worthy of our best efforts because we love Him so much. In the church of Christ we are continually trying to follow the pattern for the church Jesus envisioned. We study the New Testament for God's picture of what He wants His church to be. We want the organization and ways of

worshiping and serving to be pleasing to Him. We are coming to appreciate the power and simplicity that Jesus intended. As we continue striving to be a faithful church to honor Jesus ... the patient pursuit of that dream increases our faith in God and our love for each other.

The more we become a church that honors Jesus ... the more unusual we might appear if you compare us to traditional churches. It may be because we take the authority of the Bible so seriously. The quest to please God leads us to search the scriptures for a picture of how God would have us worship Him and serve Him.

If you visit as we worship, you might be a little surprised when our men stand up to preach and lead prayers because these worship activities are conducted ... not by clergy with special robes or titles ... but by our own brothers. And ... while many of our preachers and evangelists are highly educated ... we try not to accept any message just because of the credentials of the messenger. We are determined to listen for messages that are Christ-centered and Bible-based.

Another major emphasis of our worship together is the weekly observance of the Lord's Supper. We partake of unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine every Sunday. This memorial meal was started by Jesus himself on the night of His betrayal when He asked His disciples to let the supper always remind them of Him. I know from the New Testament that the early Christians regularly met from the purpose of eating the Lord's Supper on Sunday, "the first day of the week" (Acts 20:7).

As we participate in the Lord's Supper, we think back to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Those memories cause us to focus on the death, burial, and resurrection that each of us went through when we were baptized. Also ... each time we take the Lord's Supper ... we are obeying our Lord's request that we proclaim our continuing faith in His return, His coming again.

Each Sunday, we contribute financially as we have been prospered. The financial needs of the early church were met because Christians gave each Sunday as they had been prospered. We don't limit our giving to tithing ... since 100 percent of what we

have belongs to the Lord already ... it is a free-will gift. In our worship, we have tried to restore the simplicity and power of the New Testament church's music. Historically, instrumental music in church worship first appeared in the sixth century and was not in general use until the eighth century.

The joining of our hearts and voices in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs is a treasured part of our worship. Whether our mood is happy or sad ... prayer or praise ... we unite our voices in songs as one person. All are encouraged to sing, to understand with feeling the grand and noble thoughts of the ages. These songs are the undenominational call upward to God, to worship Him with heartfelt thanksgiving.

In our public teaching and preaching, you are very likely to hear from one or more of our elders. These are spiritual leaders of Christ's church who have been appointed to lead our congregation. Elders ... who are also referred to as pastors or shepherds of the flock work together to guide Christians as they grow and serve. Whenever I'm going through rough spots in my life, these elders are ready to pray with me and give me the benefit of their years of experience in the Lord.

Also deacons support the spiritual leadership of elders by coordinating the diverse activities of the church, such as benevolent programs.

The deacon, however, don't have to personally do every job that needs doing. Ours is a fellowship where each member is responsible for active service in the Lord's work. Jesus didn't set up a church where members could get their names on the roll, send in an occasional donation, and expect someone else to do all the work.

The Christian life is one of total commitment and personal involvement. Each member of the family has a responsibility to seek out the ways he or she can best serve the Lord. It's a responsibility that I accept gladly because my life now belongs to Jesus Christ, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

In the New Testament, the church is compared to a human body with Christ as the head. The head supplies the body with its life. The head unifies and coordinates the different organs of the

5

body. At the same time, the head depends on the body to carry out its functions. My brothers and sisters and I are the hands, the feet, and the voices by which Jesus continues His work in the world today.

One of the most exciting characteristics of the church family is the fact that we each have a part to play. There are no free rides and no part-time memberships in the church that Jesus established. Just as the members of a human body carry out complimentary functions, the members of the church's body have different strengths and talents. One may teach. Another may serve. Another's gift may be in giving ... or encouraging ... or in spreading the gospel to those who have yet to hear.

Of course, in a church made up of human beings, there always the potential for disagreement. God's remedy for that danger is the essential glue that has held His people together since the church was founded: love. Many centuries of church history have demonstrated that nobody can make enough rules and policies to guarantee peace and contentment within churches. Even compromise will not bring unity. The only thing that has ever brought religious unity on the earth has been the love of Christ ... applied in patience and understanding ... between brethren. The kindnesses that each of us needs will vary but the love of Christ motivates us to seek to save all people by the teachings in the New Testament.

In the centuries since Jesus established His church, God has continued to add people to the church as they were being saved. The scriptures promise salvation to those who believe in Christ as the Son of God ... turn from their sin ... confess their faith in Jesus as Lord ... and are baptized (immersed in water) in the name of Christ. My burial in water was a decisive act that identifies for me the moment at which Christ's saving blood began to remove my sins. Baptism demonstrated a radical turning point in my life ... the death of the old sinful person and the birth of a new creature in Christ. As a person is born again of water and the Spirit, I participated in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

In the first century, a person who became a Christian was automatically a member of the church. The same is true of churches of Christ today. There are no additional rules or

6

ceremonies which one must follow to be inducted into the church. When you are in Christ ... you are in Christ's body ... the church. No further steps are required to qualify for church membership.

For some people, the idea of a church with no earthly headquarters takes a little getting used to. But that's the way Jesus originally established it. Instead of a man-made organization restricted by all the limitation of time, space, and bureaucracy ... Jesus established a dynamic church that exists wherever people believe in Him and follow His written word.

Because it's only headquarters is in heaven, the church of Christ is not limited by languages, cultures, or international boundaries. In Spanish cultures, you may find the Iglesia de Cristo. In Germany, you will find the Gemeinde Christi and in other countries you will find the church of Christ in the language of that country.

So ... if you ask me how many members of the church of Christ there are in the world ... the only sure answer that I can give you is "I don't know." You see, God is really the only One who has the power to count His people ... and He has always placed a lot more emphasis on qualities ... than on quantities.

Christ's church today can be recognized by the fact that its behavior and loyalties are like those described in the New Testament. We are committed to cry together, laugh together, and encourage each other. We seek to bear one another's burdens. We want to support the weak and care for the lonely. We earnestly desire to demonstrate for the world around us the one quality that can actually change people: the love of Christ.

You see, your needs and mine are the same as those people in the first century when Jesus established His church. For all our space age technology, we still have not come close to conquering failure, guilt, fear, pain, or death. Our human wisdom has not been able to develop

a cure for sin. In God's plan, Jesus Christ brought the only answer to the dilemma of sin: Himself. Our problem is sin. Our solution is Christ.

We place a lot of emphasis on the Bible. We believe the scriptures are inspired by God and protected through the ages

7

for those in every age who would seek God. We are dependent on the scriptures and we believe that are fully inspired by God and authoritative for our lives.

Since only the New Testament sets forth Christ's instructions to His followers, it alone must serve as the basis for what we teach and do. And, what we learn ... we gladly share with others. In fact, I hope you and I will have a chance to study the living word together.

God loves you ... so do I. And I'm hoping and praying that the future holds a chance for you and me to sit down together ... to read God's word ... to learn together about the salvation that is in Christ and the fellowship of his followers known as the church.

The next step is yours. I can promise you this when you contact the church of Christ near you, you are going to find down-to-earth people who love Jesus Christ, who want to give Him their lives, and who would like nothing better than to share with you what they are finding in Him.

A Christian would be happy to meet you. We have so much in common already. We would love to talk with you about what Jesus means in our life.

8

Some Things You should Know —About Jesus Christ— And His Church

There are many things in the word of God that we can know for a certainty—absolute assuredness. These are matters that have to do with our becoming Christians and living a Christian life. They are not complex or intricate. Responsible people can understand them. To make this as strong as I can, I would like to say that the things that pertain to our salvation are understandable; they are unquestionable, undeniable and indisputable. God has made them plain. It would be a reflection upon Him, His goodness and His ability to contend that these Scriptures cannot be understood. Not only are they plain, but they are irrefutable.

Built By Jesus Christ

You should know that the church was built and paid for by Jesus Christ (Matthew 16:13–18; Acts 20:28); built on Christ as the only foundation (I Corinthians 3:11); not built on Paul, Apollos, Cephas, or any other man (I Corinthians 1:12–13); fully established on the first Pentecost after Christ arose from the dead (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; Mark 9:1; Acts 2).

The Name Of The Church

You should know that in the New Testament, the church is called: the temple of God (I Corinthians 3:16); the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:21–32); the body of Christ (Colossians 1:24; Ephesians 1:22–23); the kingdom of God's Son (Colossians 1:13); the house of God (Ephesians 3:15); the church (Ephesians 3:10); the church of God (I Corinthians 1:2); the church of the firstborn ones (Hebrews 12:23); the church of the Lord (Acts 20:28); the churches of Christ (Romans 16:16).

The Church And The Kingdom

You should know that the church and the kingdom are the same. John preached that the kingdom was near (Matthew 3:2). Jesus said: "...I

will give you the keys of the kingdom" (Matthew 16:18–19). We have been delivered from darkness and translated

9

into the kingdom (Colossians 1:13). He has called us into His kingdom (I Thessalonians 2:12). Christ is our King—eternal, immortal, invisible (I Timothy 1:17). He is King of kings and Lord of lords (I Timothy 6:15).

Jesus Christ Loved The Church

You should know that Christ Himself: loved the church (Ephesians 5:25); shed His blood for the church (Acts 20:28); established the church (Matthew 16:18); called the church His (Matthew 16:18; added people to the church (Acts 2:47); is the head of the church (Ephesians 5:23; 4:4; 1:22–23); will save the church (Ephesians 5:23).

In The Church

You should know that in the church there is: Redemption (Ephesians 1:7); forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:13–14); sanctification (Ephesians 5:25); all spiritual blessings are in Christ (Ephesians 1:3).

How To Become A Member Of The Church

You should know that to get into the church you must believe in Christ (John 8:24; Acts 16:31; Hebrews 11:6); repent of your sins (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; 3:19); confess faith in Christ (Matthew 10:32–33; Romans 10:10); be baptized (Acts 2:38; 10:48; I Peter 3:21; Galatians 3:27).

One In Name And Doctrine

You should know that in New Testament times there was: one family of God (Ephesians 3:15); one kingdom of Christ (Colossians 1:13–14); one body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22–23; 4:4); one bride of Christ (Romans 7:1–7; Ephesians 5:22–23); one church of Christ (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 1:22–23; 4:4); name of its people (Acts 11:26;

Isaiah 62:2); added to the church (Acts 2:47); give the church its doctrine (II John 9–10; Galatians 1:1).

Requirement Of Baptism

You should know that baptism requires: you get into the church (Acts 2:37–47); you put on Christ (Galatians 3:27); you walk in

10

newness of life (Romans 6:3–5); you obey Christ (Acts 10:48; II Thessalonians 1:7–9); water (Acts 10:47); much water (John 3:23); going to the water (Acts 8:36; Matthew 3:5–6); going down into the water (Acts 8:38); a burial (Romans 6:3–4; Colossians 2:12); a planting (Romans 6:5); a washing (Acts 22:16); a birth (John 3:5); a raising out of the water (Colossians 2:12); a coming up out of the water (Acts 8:39).

You should know that in baptism: sins are washed away (Acts 22:16); you are saved from your sins (I Peter 3:21; Mark 16:16); you have remission of sins (Acts 2:38); you get into Christ (Galatians 3:27); you are added to the church (Acts 2:47).

Christ's Teaching

You should know that Christ gave the church His doctrine. Teaching or accepting another gospel will condemn souls (Galatians 1:6–10). Must not go beyond the things which are written (I Corinthians 4:6). If anyone goes on and does not abide in His doctrine, he does not have Christ (II John 9). If one does abide in His doctrine, he has both the Father and the Son (II John 10). Nothing must be added or subtracted (Revelation 22:18–19).

What Members Are Called

You should know that members of the church are called: members (I Corinthians 12:27); disciples (Acts 6:1); believers (Acts 5:14; II Corinthians 6:15); saints (Acts 9:13; Romans 1:7; Philemon 1:1); priests (I Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6); children (I John 3:2); Christians (Acts 11:16; 26:28–29; I Peter 4:16).

Leaders Of The Church

You should know that those who lead the local congregation (church) are called: elders, bishops (overseers), pastors (shepherds), leaders—all referring to the same work (I Timothy 3:1-7; Acts 20:17; 20:28; Titus 1:7-9). Their duty is to oversee and feed the flock (Acts 20:28; I Timothy 3:17; Titus 1:5-9; I Peter 5:1-4). Deacons are to serve the church (Acts 6:1-6; I Timothy 3:8-13). Evangelists are to teach and preach the word of God (Ephesians 4:11; I and II Timothy and Titus).

11

Jesus Christ Purchased His Church

You should know that man did not: purpose the church (Ephesians 3:10-11); purchase the church (Acts 20:28); build the church (Matthew 16:18); name its people (Acts 11:16; Isaiah 62:2).

The Church And The Body Of Christ

You should know that the church and the body of Christ are: the same, "Which is His body" (Ephesians 1:23). All are reconciled to God in the body (Ephesians 2:16). One body (Ephesians 4:4). We are members of His body (Ephesians 5:30). "He is the Head of the body" (Colossians 1:18). We are called into one body (Colossians 3:15).

Worship

You should know that the faithful in the church must: worship in Spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24); must meet upon the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; Hebrews 10:25); must sing (not play) (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16); must pray (Acts 2:42; I Timothy 2:1-2); must edify one another (I Corinthians 14:15-27); must eat the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; Hebrews 10:26; I Corinthians 11:20-32); must give of their money (I Corinthians 16:1-2; II Corinthians 9:7).

Work Of The Church

You should know that the work of the church today is: preaching the gospel (II Timothy 4:1-7); teaching (I Timothy 3:1-2; Ephesians 3:10-11); visiting the sick (Matthew 25:34-40); caring for the fatherless and widows (James 1:27).

The Church Today

You should know that the same church today: is in many communities; is not a denomination; is faithful to God's word; is one in fact and teaching; gains members by obedience to the gospel; has the same freedom from human powers; has the same names for its members; has the same names for the church. You should know that you are a member of the church by obeying the gospel described in the New Testament.

NOT TO BE SOLD

A free Bible Correspondence Course
Is Available from:
WORLD BIBLE SCHOOL
Department: M.P.
P.O. BOX 9346
Austin, Texas 78766, USA

For further study of the Bible,
information about the Scriptures or a
place to worship, please contact the
Church of Christ nearest you.

MISSION PRINTING, INC.
World Evangelism by the Printed Page
A Work of Churches of Christ
P.O. Box 3029
Arlington, Texas 76004

Back Cover