The Church history lesson

Saying church paints a picture in your mind of a building. For some it’s stained glass and the sound of a piano. For others it’s pews and a projector with a passionate message. For others still, it’s speaking in tongues and handling snakes. None for me thanks. So, we’re going to take a look at our history of the Church of Christ.

For starters we have to look at the term “church”. It is defined as a group of Christians, it’s also a word for assembly. The word church in the bible comes from the Greek word ecclesia, which means a called-out company or group. Where ever it is used in the bible it refers to people. Look at Acts 19:30-41, Acts 7:38 as well as reference to the body of Christ see Ephesians 1:22,5:25&32. It’s also used to refer to a group of believers. Check out 1 Cor. 1:2, Gal 1:13, Matthew 16:18, Eph 5:23-27. Therefore, from these texts we can conclude that the church isn’t just a building. That’s where we fellowship and worship. We are the church. Christ is the head and we, the church, are the body.

So, let’s take a look at how this church came to be. Specifically, the church of Christ. What makes it special is our desire to restore to the church back to the new testament church laid out in Acts and the new testament. Not in dress or languages but in doctrines, ordinances and faith. Because of this “restore” mindset we have come to be known as part of the restoration movement.

The Restoration movement is a movement that started in America in 1794-1835, six separate groups started without knowing about each other. They wanted to get away from the traditional church settings including the pomp and circumstance, and restore the church back to what was laid out in the Bible. This is amazing to me that 6 separate groups read God’s word and used that as blue prints for establishing a Church. The 6 groups that started these restoration movements are

James O’Kelly-He was a Methodist minister in Virginia. They started to move back to the bible blue print and referred to themselves as “Christian” only.

Abner Jones- He started in 1801 as a Baptist from Vermont and New Hampshire, he broke away from the Baptist church and started and independent movement with the purpose of returning to the “old paths”

Elias Smith- Started in Connecticut in 1807, another Baptist led his congregation into restoring back to the New Testament blue prints. He eventually joined with Abner jones and went on to establish congregations each calling themselves simply “Christians”

Barton W. Stone- While these movements started in the east, this Presbyterian minister from Kentucky, took his whole congregation and formed a group named the “Cane Ridge Christian Church”, calling themselves Christians, rejecting human creeds and party names, appealing only to the Bible for their guidance in faith and conduct.

Alexander and Thomas Campbell movement- At the same time this father/son duo of Presbyterian ministers from Pennsylvania broke away from their denominational background and began organizing Christian Churches through out the state. By 1832 the Campbell group, which was much bigger than the stone movement churches came together to become the largest and fastest growing religious organization of that time. Their union was based on the need to restore the church back to what it was originally.

Scotch Baptist movement- One of the smaller groups to break away from denominational norms they started in New York and their leaders came from all different backgrounds in order to get back to the basics. Some examples of where their leadership came from is Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian.

It should be noted that these restoration movements were going on around the world, in Russia, Ghana, and Chile at various times also.

This is what started the differences between denominational and non-denominational churches. The need to go back to Bible, to follow God’s word’s teachings. The differences between these two groups is pretty simple.

1.We have no name other than what was given to us “Christians. Check out for reference Acts 11:26 and Romans 16:16.

2. We do not follow any man-made creed or motto. Creed coming from the latin Credo meaning I believe, ours would be simply we believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, as Lord and as Savior. This is different than our church’s catchphrase of Love God, Love People. Which is more of a marketing and advertising saying to help people know what our main focus is. For Church of Christ’ motto it was stated by one man as “We have no creed but Christ, no book but the Bible, no name but the name Christian.”

3. We have no book except for the Bible. Referring to rules that would be passed down by overseeing bodies or that were not part of the Canonized Bible.

4. Each church is governed or overseen by the congregation itself. Meaning that we don’t have a Pope or a board that oversees all the Churches of Christ.

Our church is governed by itself, so this is how it looks.

Elders- Men who have been voted on based on spiritual maturity who are responsible for overseeing the congregation’s spiritual health. As well as ministries and teaching materials.

Ministers- Who share God’s word and over see the preaching based on the guidance of the Elders.

Deacons-Voted on by the congregation, they are the caretakers of the flock and church building.

From there Sunday school teachers, satellite ministries are all voted on by the congregation. As well as we have a set of by-laws which is simply a set of rules for use of the building and designations for responsibilities of the ministers and various offices like secretary, and treasurer.

These are the differences between denomination and non-denominational churches. Our Church started as part of the Stone-Campbell movement to restore the church back to the Bible’s original plan. With that being said this applies to all things including that we believe that just like the early church baptism means immersion, the deity of Christ, the importance of living a Christian life and the promise of eternal life for the faithful believer.