

The Unshakable Kingdom

When we talk about restoring the New Testament Church various objections are at times heard:

- Some claim that the Church of Christ is nothing more than a human denomination that was started by Alexander Campbell in the 19th century in America. First, such an argument often is self-contradictory. On the one hand some making this argument are using the word “denomination” in a negative sense, and yet the same people will say that there is nothing wrong with being a denomination. If we say there is nothing wrong with denominationalism, then we are immediately at odds with what Jesus and Paul said (*John 17:20-21; 1 Corinthians 1:10-13; Ephesians 4:4-6*), and if we say that the church of Christ is just another denomination, then one is saying that the church that Jesus established no longer exists, and thus we contradict other passages (*Matthew 16:18-19; Hebrews 12:28*).
- Others claim that the Church of Christ is woefully having little (if no) impact upon the religious world and that we are not in the lead concerning setting the tone or direction in theological discussions, yet what many forget is that God has already set the tone and it is not our task to take the lead in presenting new opinions on religious topics, rather we are to stay within the will and doctrine of Christ (*2 John 9; Galatians 1:6-9*). This complaint equally ignores that God’s people will be walking on a different path than even the popular religious writers and thinkers of the times (*2 Timothy 4:2-4*). In this lesson we will see that this was not only true in the First Century, but in every century.
- Finally, some just cannot believe that the true church comprises such a small percentage of the world’s population, and yet Jesus already addressed this

issue (*Matthew 7:13-14*).

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“Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude” (Hebrews 12:28).

“To Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations” (Ephesians 3:21).

“Upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it” (Matthew 16:18)

In light of such passages, we should cautiously steer away from the idea that the true church vanished and completely ceased to exist after the apostasy hit that was predicted in such passages as (*Acts 20:29; 2 Timothy 4:2-4*). In addition, when we remember that the “seed” that produces Christians in any generation or culture is the word of God (*Matthew 13:19*), and this seed is incorruptible (*1 Peter 1:23-25*). It would be naïve to think that the first century, 19th century or any other century was the only time that good and honest hearts existed among men. Certainly, every generation has men and women who want the truth (*Mark 4:20*).

Understanding the Bible is not something within the reach of only an elite minority, but rather, the Bible was written within the understanding of every culture (*Mark 16:15-16*). Thus, understanding that baptism is for the remission of sins is not a 19th century attainment, rather people in the 19th or the first century can understand that one needs to be baptized to be saved, for after all, that is what the text says (*Acts 2:38*). The rest of this lesson consists of looking for people who were wanting the truth, especially after the apostasy hit the church.

John Cassian

He lived during the time of Augustine (c. 360-435 A.D.) and strongly opposed the views of Augustine. It is clear from the writings of Cassian that the teachings of Augustine and Pelagius were of recent origin. He taught free will, rejected the teachings of original sin and predestination, and refers back to the Scriptures as a defense of his position.

Paulicians

Around the late 500's A.D. a group of people were called Paulicians, because of their ability to defend their doctrines from the New Testament, particularly from the letters of the apostle Paul. They said they were Christians who were chosen of God, called each other brother and sister, rejected infant baptism, and taught rather that faith is required before baptism. They practiced baptism and generally rejected the teachings of Catholicism.

Berengarius

Between the years 999 and 1010 the above man was born. Today he is remembered mainly for his opposition to the Catholic doctrine of Transubstantiation. What is often ignored is that he equally opposed many other traditions such as infant baptism.

The “only church of the saints”

In 1118 Gregory Grimm of France died after being tortured because he had been baptized by his grandfather who in turn had been baptized (by immersion for the remission of sins) by a traveling merchant from Venetia who as from the “only church of the saints”. In 1143 a congregation of over 100 was seized on the lower Rhine. Under torture they confessed that such congregations were everywhere but in concealment. Because there was no organized hierarchy it was extremely difficult for the authorities to find congregations as each had its own bishops and deacons. A complaint was made in 1146 to Bernard that a sect who had rejected infant baptism in favor of believers baptism, had formed a “church of Christ” separate and apart from the Catholic church. Their elders offered to debate with the Catholic Church their beliefs in light of the teachings of the Scriptures. This offer was rejected and instead they were burnt at the stake and the congregation was destroyed.

Oxford England

During the years 1157 and 1166, first thirty and then eighty men and women came to Oxford where they established a congregation. They were French religious

exiles fleeing persecution. Their beliefs rejected the teachings of Catholicism. They said that infants were not to be baptized, until they come to an age of understanding. When asked who they were they replied that they were Christians and their only teaching came from the Bible.

Celtic Hill

Dr. Hans Grimm in his small book, 'Tradition and History of the Early Churches of Christ in Central Europe' on page 19 writes, "Even as late as 1390 A.D. a New Testament church in Celtic Hill Cliff in Wales built a room for worship with a great basin for immersion of adults in baptism of confession of faith".

Thus one writer notes that prior to the Reformation and especially the Restoration Movement in America, in Europe we find congregations of believers who understood:

- Each congregation was to be autonomous (1 Peter 5:2) and was governed by its own elders.
- The practice of baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).
- Baptism was by immersion, not sprinkling or pouring (Romans 6:3).
- Infants were not be baptized, because sin was not inherited.
- Faith and confession must occur prior to baptism (Acts 8:36-37).
- They saw themselves as the true Church of Christ—not a denomination.
- They had no separate clergy.

What we need to understand is that during these years "Christians" were often discovered and persecuted or killed by their absence from Catholic services. Often the village constable would visit the absentees in the community. If there was good reason for missing services, they were excused. If they were found though to have left the Catholic Church then punishment would come quickly.

Anabaptists

Long before the arrival of the Baptist denomination there had been in England people known as "Anabaptists", from the Greek meaning to "rebaptize". This was a nickname given to those seeking to baptize believers who had already been "baptized" as infants. These people had existed in England long before the Reformation and as early as 1525 they stated their opposition to the Reformation,

which was not going far enough to restore true New Testament Christianity. Thus by 1640 we find in England groups teaching that men have free will, rejecting the doctrine of original sin, acknowledging that baptism is immersion and it is for the remission of sins for persons on confession of their faith in Christ, teaching a priesthood of believers, appointing elders and deacons in each congregation, and opposing to the idea of denominationalism. Yet after this time Calvinism would start to invade many such groups, and a number of these groups would simply evolve into the Baptism denomination. Yet not everyone went along with this change. During the 1800's those who did not compromise came into contact with the Restoration Movement in America.

The “church of Christ’ Survey

In 1818 a church in New York sent a letter to “the churches of Christ, scattered over the earth”, asking them for a statement of their views and practices. These letters were later printed in *The Christian Baptist*, a paper edited by Alexander Campbell (1788-1866). The church in New York met on the first of the week, sang hymns, observed the Lord’s Supper, prayed, read Scripture and gave of their means. In addition, they required “that all whom we receive into fellowship should believe in their heart, and confess with their mouth, that Jesus is the Christ; that he died for our sins, according to the Scriptures; and that upon such confession, and such alone, they should be baptized”. The letter was signed on March 1, 1818 by the congregation’s two elders and three deacons (*The Christian Baptist, Volume 5, Issue 4, November 1827*).

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