

Introduction:

1. The question above is one I hear often. Sometimes it is asked by people I invite to worship; sometimes it is asked over the phone; it may even be asked by visitors to our assemblies.
 - a. Perhaps you are visiting with us today and have a question like this.
 - b. Or maybe you are a new member of the church, and wonder how you should answer this question when it is asked of you.
 - c. On my slide, I have pictured both an adult and a little toddler. Why? Because most adults in the general public don't know any more about the church of Christ than kids do—and maybe less, because little kids haven't yet been tainted by faulty doctrines. When a person learns false doctrine, they often wind up farther away from the truth than when they knew nothing. In any case, many adults are just as puzzled over a question like this as a little child would be.
 - d. We want to communicate a clear and mature understanding of the church, 1 Corinthians 14:20.
2. Believe it or not, not all churches are the same. If you have thought that "a church is a church is a church," then I would urge you to investigate more closely.
 - a. Churches vary widely in their organizational arrangements.
 - b. Some churches differ greatly from others in their goals and purposes for existence.
 - c. Churches differ radically in their doctrines and practices.
 - d. You may be surprised to learn that many hold opposing views about the Bible itself.
3. If you are visiting with us today, perhaps you've been "looking for a church" to be part of.
 - a. Maybe you are looking for a church that is striving to be like the one you read about in the New Testament—nothing more nor less than just a Bible church.
 - b. That is what we are trying to be—simply a group of Christians banded together who follow no creed but the Bible, who sincerely strive to teach what it says, 1 Peter 4:11.
 - c. In my answer I speak only for the Dowlen Road Church. Others can speak for themselves.

The Lesson:**I. A church that specializes in just being a church.**

- A. People sometimes wonder why we do not have a kitchen, banquet hall or gymnasium.
 1. This church sponsors no ball teams, concerts or secular activities.
 2. While wholesome social and secular activities are important in the life of a Christian, God distinguishes between those responsibilities given to the home and those given to the church, 1 Corinthians 11:22, 34.
 3. It is our intent to specialize in being a church; we encourage parents to specialize in building good homes. Parents should provide the secular and recreational needs of their families just like they provide for economic, educational and political needs.
- B. We do wish to draw all men to the Lord, and we do seek to enrich the lives of our young people.
 1. But, in doing that, we will make no pretense to being something other than what Christ ordained a church to be. Jesus purchased the church with his own blood, and it was thereby established for spiritual purposes, Ephesians 5:25-27; 1 Peter 2:5. This being the case, we will not misdirect the church, making it into a secular institution.
 2. The gospel is God's power to draw men, Romans 1:16; John 6:44-45. Whether young or old, all who sincerely seek to please God will be drawn and held by its power.

II. A church just like that which was built by Jesus.

- A. But, is that really possible in our time—to be just like the church you read about in the New Testament? Can we be a 1st century church in the 21st century?
 1. Yes, because of a law that exists in both the physical and natural realms: seed always produces after its kind. (Apple seeds will only produce apple trees, etc.)
 2. When the same spiritual seed is planted in the hearts of men and women today as in the first century, it will produce the same as it did then, Luke 8:11; 1 Peter 1:23.
 3. When the uncorrupted seed is preached, believed and obeyed—without any addition or subtraction—the characteristics of New Testament Christianity will be reproduced.

4. This is why we tell people, "If we are doing something for which we have no Bible authority, show us by the Bible and we will stop doing it; or if you show us something in the Bible that we are supposed to practice but have failed to do, we will start doing it."
 5. This attitude toward Bible authority is what makes us unique in the religious world today. We believe it makes a difference with God what we do, Matthew 7:21.
- B. What about the organization of the church? We are just like the church in the book of Acts.
1. We are organized on a local basis with our own elders, just like in Acts 14:23. Other congregations just like this one exist throughout the world, but there are no earthly headquarters or organizational ties, just churches following the same book.
 2. Just like in the book of Acts, this local congregation is independent and self-governing, recognizing Christ as the only head, Ephesians 1:22-23; the Bible as the only creed, 2 John 9.
 3. The elders of this congregation do not attempt to oversee the work or funds of any other congregation. We recognize that we are limited in our oversight, 1 Peter 5:2.
 4. God has no organizational structure than the local church. That comes as a surprise to many people, especially when you consider the National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches. These exist, but God has no organization larger than the local church.
- C. What about the mission of the church, its goal or purpose for existence?
1. We have a mission from God. It is a mission to all of mankind. Our primary mission is to preach the good news of salvation by grace through faith. If God so loved the world as He did, John 3:16, then the least we can do is to make this love known to our fellow man. This is the work God has given us. It is not a work we decided upon for ourselves.
 - a. We then, seek to bring the lost to Christ, and those who have come to Christ we seek to encourage and help on their way to heaven, Matthew 28:19-20.
 - b. Our purpose for existence is therefore spiritual in nature, 1 Peter 2:5.
- D. What about the worship of the church? Since we comprise a spiritual house, we meet to worship God just as Christians did in New Testament days. We are careful to imitate the early Christians.
1. We come together to sing, pray and study the Bible, and on the first day of the week, we partake of the Lord's Supper and give as God has prospered us, Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:2; Colossians 3:16; Acts 2:42.
 2. Just as we take great care to do what is found in the New Testament, we take equal care not to add anything to our worship, lest it be in vain, Matthew 15:9.
 3. We are motivated by a sincere love for God to worship and serve Him. That is why you find in our assemblies emphasis on reading and studying God's word, the Bible.
- E. What about membership in the church? "How can I become a member of this church?"
1. Let me suggest that rather than focusing on being a member of this local church, that you focus on doing the will of God—obeying His gospel to be saved.
 - a. When one obeys the gospel, the Lord adds him to the universal body of believers, Acts 2:47. The universal church is comprised of all the saved the world over. It is made up of those who have heard God's word, Romans 10:17; who have believed the truth, Mark 16:15-16; who have repented of sin, Acts 2:38; who have confessed Christ, Romans 10:9-10; and who have been immersed in water for the remission of sins, Acts 2:38.
 - b. When one has done this he is saved; he is a Christian; he is added by the Lord to the church, the universal body of the saved, Acts 2:47.
 2. The saved person then needs to associate himself with a local assembly of saints, wherein he cooperates with other Christians in doing God's work.
 - a. After obeying the gospel, Saul of Tarsus understood the need to work with disciples who comprised a local church, Acts 9:26. If Saul (Paul, the apostle) of Tarsus were here today, he would find this church just like the Jerusalem church.
 - b. Everyone, like Saul of Tarsus, who has obeyed the gospel of Christ, and is striving to serve Christ, is welcome into the fellowship of churches of Christ.

Conclusion:

1. Do you need to obey the gospel today? Wouldn't you like to be just a Christian? You can be. And you can be part of a church that is made up of people who are just Christians.
2. Will you become a Christian today? Do you need to be restored to fellowship with Him?