

# Defender



*“I am set for the defense of the gospel”*

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## The United Church of Christ and the Church of Christ Are Not the Same!

*David B. Smith*

Lately, several people have asked about the organization known as the United Church of Christ. The group has been in the headlines for the last few months because of its endorsement of the homosexual agenda. Its Synod met recently and passed a resolution to approve same-sex marriages. One source suggested that approval rating in the membership for the decision is about eighty percent. That is, the majority of the membership favors “gay marriage.” Naturally people are curious about the group since “Church of Christ” is a part of the organization’s title. Some members of the Lord’s church (the church of Christ) have been asked about the approval of “gay marriage,” as if the United Church of Christ and the church of Christ are the same. One dear sister was even asked by a co-worker what she would do now that “her church” was endorsing homosexuality. They are not the same, and people need to know the difference.

The United Church of Christ was founded in the late 1950s. The easiest way to describe the group is by drawing attention to other groups. Think of the controversy surrounding the Episcopalian religion not long ago because it confirmed a known homosexual to oversee a diocese. People thought, “they are definitely a liberal group.” If it can be imagined, amplify the liberalism of groups like the Episcopalians or the Disciples of Christ and you will have an idea what the United Church of Christ is like. Their endorsement of homosexuality alone should say something about this newly-formed denomination.

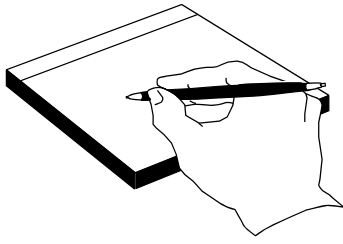
The group is organized by human standards. Mead records the structure of the organization, stating:

Beside the local church stands the associations, conferences, and the general synod. Local churches in a geographic area are grouped into an association.... Associations are grouped into conferences.... It meets annually, and its main function is to coordinate the work and witness of its local churches and associations, to render counsel and advisory service, and to establish conference offices, centers, institutions, and other agencies (290).

Synods, presidents, clergy/laity distinctions, conferences, and such like clearly distinguish the United Church of Christ from the church built by the Lord in organization. The UCC is a man-made organization ruled by men; the church of the Christ is a divine organism guided by its head Jesus the Christ. For the friends and neighbors who ask, please show them the biblical basis for true organization—in order for them to understand that the UCC is just the work of a man. The statement made in Acts 14:23 is a good starting point: “And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.” In every individual congregation, the apostles appointed a plurality of qualified men (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-11) to oversee, protect, and feed the local flock (Acts 20:28; 1 The. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:1-3). The words used of these men—

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# Notes From The Editor



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## Purpose

There are some who are now trying to defend the reevaluation/reconfirmation of elders based upon the purpose for the action (they just do not call it this). I would never denigrate the aspect of purpose behind actions. It is true that if one has an authorized activity, that one's purpose in doing the action is also important. The action might be scriptural but the individual (or group) doing it might sin because of their purpose. We see this principle with those who preached the Truth but their purpose was to bring affliction to Paul (Phi. 1:15-16). However, one cannot justify an action based upon the purpose of the action. Consider some examples with me.

It is God's desire that all men be saved. "Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). Jesus came to "seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). It should also be the desire of every Christian to save souls (Mat. 28:19-20; Acts 8:4; et. al.). Even as it was Jesus' purpose to seek and save the lost, so it should be the desire of Christians today to do the same.

When children are conceived, they are innocent. The Bible never teaches anything such as the Calvinist doctrine of Hereditary Depravity. Jesus taught that one must become like a little baby to enter the kingdom. "And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Mat. 18:3). He also taught that the kingdom consisted of ones who were like little babies. "But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Mat. 19:14). Thus, we know that those babies in the womb are without sin. If one of those babies dies, he will enter heaven's home. Therefore, for the purpose of saving souls, we can state that

abortion is now right! Now we would not advocate abortion for any other reason, and if one gets an abortion for some other reason it is certainly wrong and needs to be condemned. However, if the purpose is to save the souls of those babies who are at this point free of sin (if they grow up most of them will be lost), then certainly no one would object to this way of saving souls.

Brother Lee Davis is in need of additional support for his work in teaching at Four Seas College in Singapore. In playing blackjack, a person can learn to count cards and by doing so can turn the odds in his favor instead of the odds favoring the house (this is why casinos refuse them entrance if they know they are counting cards). Thus, while we all recognize that gambling is sinful, if we change the purpose of the gambling, surely no one will object. The purpose is no longer a selfish purpose, to gain money for self; it is now for the purpose of supporting a missionary. Everyone agrees that supporting missionaries is a good work and greatly needed today. Thus, when the purpose changes to doing this good work, it will make the action of gambling all right.

I would pray that no one would ever argue such as the two previous examples. However, we have preaching brethren who are now arguing the same principle as these ridiculous arguments above, only they argue that a congregation may reevaluate/reconfirm elders. The way in which this is argued is that it would be wrong if it is a "hostile" takeover (whatever that means). They generally also admit that it would be wrong if they do this on a regular basis (how regular no one knows). However, if there is a stalemate in the eldership and some of those elders are not what they should be and thus blocking the eldership from doing the right things, then to get rid of those unscriptural and unqualified elders a congregation may engage in this process of reevaluating and reconfirming the present elders (I wonder if the liberal elders would consider this a "hostile" takeover?).

Thus, you have that if it is done for the purpose of a takeover or on a regular basis, then it is wrong; but if you do it for the purpose of getting rid of some liberal elders who are causing a stalemate in the eldership, then it is right. What difference is there in this line of argumentation and the line of argumentation for abortion or gambling?

To justify the action of reevaluating and reconfirming elders these ask how you deal with the situation where you have a stalemate in the eldership or have

liberal elders in the eldership. Instead of simply doing what the Bible authorizes, they devise a scheme which destroys the authority of the eldership and gives it to the congregation. The elders are shepherds under the Chief Shepherd. Would these same individuals agree to reevaluate and reconfirm the Chief Shepherd? If you can do it to one, why not the other? The fact of the matter is that the action is wrong to begin with.

What does the Bible teach about elders who are not what they are suppose to be? Listen to Paul give instructions to Timothy on this: “Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear” (1 Tim. 5:19-20). This procedure is simply not good enough for many. Instead they wring their hands and come up with some unauthorized action to get rid of unscriptural elders. Brethren, let us start doing what the Bible says instead of following man-made ways.

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(Continued from page 1)

“pastors,” “overseers,” “elders,” or “bishops”—merely describe their role within the local church. This is important for several reasons. For one, it establishes the autonomy of each local congregation. No eldership or congregation has the oversight of another. The government is self-contained. Remember that the church is a divine monarchy, so the ultimate source of authority is the Christ. While the actions of each congregation are certainly open for scrutiny (Rev. 2-3), there is no earthly headquarters to which local congregations report. Their king is in heaven, not on earth. Next, it shows that scriptural organization requires a plurality of “pastor/elders” and not one. The very idea of “one pastor over a church” (denomination) or “one man (pope) on earth over all congregations” (Catholicism) is the same corrupted doctrine that spawned a great apostasy in the mid-second century A.D. In local churches, there are also to be deacons (Phi. 1:1). While their work is not equal to that of an eldership, it is no less important. The qualifications (1 Tim. 3:8-13) and the name itself describe their important work—the work of service. Yet everyone is important in the Lord’s body. There are no “clergy/laity” separations; this is foreign to the Word of God. Elders, deacons, and all members of the church of the Christ are members one of another. This pattern is not evident in the United Church of Christ, thus it bears no connection to the true

Lord’s church.

Those interested in an in-depth study of the UCC should reference the organization’s self-published materials, especially the sections that detail the documents they consider authoritative. It is certain that in the UCC, man-made documents and creeds get high-praise and attention on par with the Bible. Councils (like the Nicaean Council of A.D. 325) are accepted as God-ordained which demonstrates the Catholic roots of the group. However, the Lord teaches that His people have no rule of faith and practice but the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The New Testament is the “once-for-all” delivered pattern for the church (Jude 3), and it provides all the necessary guidance for “life and godliness” (2 Pet. 1:3). Everything man needs to know to serve God faithfully in this life is provided in the Bible. Accordingly, no group is “of” God if it does not follow the book God gave. While the UCC might be glad to say *Bible*, it does not consider the Bible to be an objective and exclusive source of authority. That is the difference between the UCC and the church of Christ.

Another notable difference between the two is the UCC’s use of women in the role that God gave specifically to men. Many *preachers* for the UCC are female. Yet the Bible is clear: “But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence” (1 Tim. 2:12). God designated men to lead in spiritual matters (1 Tim. 2:8-15). This is also a difference between the Lord’s church and the United Church of Christ denomination.

Other notable differences include the UCC’s tolerance toward unethical activities, their employment of unauthorized innovations in worship (like mechanical instruments of music), their founding date/place, their corrupted plan of salvation, et cetera.

The point is that while the designations for both groups share some similarities, there is a world of difference between the two. It is unfortunate that the similarities have caused a bit of confusion, but it has also provided an opportunity to “*give* an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Pet. 3:15). Since people are asking, why not take the chance to tell them about the true Lord’s church and at the same time voice opposition to the sinful practice of homosexuality? Surely this is redeeming the time and thus pleasing to God.

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# Edification

Gary W. Summers

How often do people just grow up and accept the teachings and traditions of their childhood without really thinking through those things? Not only must information that we were taught be re-examined, so must the more subtle impressions which created false ideas be corrected. Since it is convenient to do so in this instance, I will use myself as an example.

Growing up in the Methodist Church, I formed certain views of “church” and what “worship” was all about. A sermon, for instance, contained an average of one Scripture—one which was usually read at the beginning of the hour. A sermon was designed to be boring. An organ was for playing religious hymns. Only the best singers were allowed to be in the choir, and everyone else listened to them. Before the sermon the organ would play (loudly) while the people came in to be seated. After the sermon the organ would play while the people filed past the minister to shake his hand and tell him, “Nice sermon.” Everyone was then free to move about their lives until the next Sunday morning. Tithing was very important.

It is strange how many of these wrong notions (except the last one mentioned) have been adopted by members of the Lord’s church; our goal here is to present what the Bible teaches about all these things, beginning with the purpose for our meeting in the first place.

## The Church

How often do those in denominations preach about the church? Probably there was some teaching which I simply fail to recall, but even if it is mentioned that the Lord built His church (Mat. 6:18) or that He purchased the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28), where in the Scriptures does someone go to teach about the Methodist Church? Neither they nor any other religious denomination can find their origin in the Scriptures.

Lost in this institution of substitution is not only the ownership and sacrifice of Christ on the church’s behalf, but the very nature and purpose for coming together is also obscured. A religious denomination such as the Methodists, for example, exists not to make people Christians—but to make them Methodists (the same is true of any religious group). In other words, the Bible can teach a person how to be a Christian, but no one becomes a Methodist without extra-biblical teaching. Catholics and Lutherans have composed cate-

chisms, which will indoctrinate those who study in the ways of Catholicism or Lutheranism. Religious groups, in other words, do not merely have as their goal making someone a Christian; they desire to make someone a Christian *plus*.

Therefore, their understanding and teaching concerning the church as the body of Christ for which He died is somewhat skewed by their attempt to weave a man-made, unauthorized denomination into the fabric. The purpose for worship becomes in some measure propaganda to perpetuate the religious sect, which in turn puts an emphasis on making it palatable for all—perhaps even entertaining.

In reality, Jesus loved the church and gave Himself for it (Eph. 5:25). It has purposes for existence, but these are not the same as those of denominationalism. The church of the Bible exists to save sinners. The church has the responsibility to preach the Gospel of Christ to the lost, not recruit members. As a secondary result of people obeying the Gospel, Jesus adds them to His church (Acts 2:41, 47).

Have members of the body of Christ been influenced by this type of thinking that devalues the work of Christ and the importance of salvation to treat the church as a mere social club which periodically has a membership drive? Rather, we are God’s people with an important work to accomplish.

## Worship

Closely related to the correct ideas of the New Testament teaching regarding the church is its worship. The meeting of brethren on the first day of the week is not for purely social reasons, although we do greet, speak, and socialize with one another. The purpose of worship is two-fold. First, we come together as a body of believers to offer up our collective worship to God. Although Paul was in a hurry to get to Jerusalem in time for the Passover, he waited six days for the church to meet on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7).

How did he know they would be meeting then? Paul had been engaged in this region in evangelism; in fact, he writes: “Furthermore, when I came to Troas to *preach* Christ’s gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit” (2 Cor. 2:12-13a). Paul had established these churches; therefore, he knew what he had taught them and what they practiced. The time for brethren to meet for worship was on the

first day of the week.

Brethren in Troas met then “to break bread,” which stands for the Lord’s Supper, which in turn represents all the acts of worship. Some have erroneously concluded that the Lord’s Supper is the most important aspect of worship; in truth, everything done in the assembly is important. The writer of Hebrews exhorts members of the body of Christ not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together (Heb. 10:25). Some have been known to come into worship, take the Lord’s Supper, and leave. They not only fail to worship God properly; they also have lost sight of the second purpose for God’s people coming together—to edify one another.

The idea of trying to remain aloof from the members of the body of Christ is foreign to the New Testament, and it would be just as silly for a finger to (if possible) wander off by itself and to maintain its own agenda. No one thrives spiritually apart from the other members of the body. In fact, the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers were all given for “the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11-12).

Every new Christian has the responsibility to grow (1 Pet. 2:2), which results from the teaching of the Word: “And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified” (Acts 20:32). Christians have an obligation to edify one another (1 The. 5:11). This important task cannot be accomplished for those who wish to be as isolated as possible from their brothers and sisters. In many congregations there is an individual or a family who never attends Bible classes, shows up for worship only on Sunday morning, usually sits in the back row, and leaves as soon as the final “Amen” is said. One couple in a particular congregation would not even hang around that long; they would leave during the closing song. How can such actions fulfill the definition of *edification*?

Have some retained denominational concepts? How are these actions different from what many in denominations do? The only differences are that we have no organ blaring in the background and we use more Scriptures in a sermon. The same cold attitude may remain. If we had choirs, these folks would probably not object because they seldom enthusiastically participate in the singing.

What are God’s expectations concerning worship? He desires that we do so in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). *In spirit* means that we are offering God our worship from the heart. Our singing and praying cannot be mechanical, ritualistic, or cold. It ought to flow from a grateful heart. To call it a “raucous celebration” goes a bit too far, but it should be characterized by exuberance.

To worship *in truth* means that it must be according to the Word of God rather than according to the wisdom and preferences of man. Worship is directed to God; we are edified by it; nothing in the New Testament indicates that it is to entertain people who are bored with what God has required or too shallow to think about spiritual concepts. Some care nothing for truth—that what we do is authorized by God; such an attitude was not that of the Bereans, who searched the Scriptures daily to see if the things Paul were teaching were the truth (Acts 17:11).

Many people today possess more of the spirit of Cain, who brought to God what **he** wanted rather than what God required (Gen. 4:1-6). Many people prefer “will worship” (Col. 2:23—KJV) or “self-imposed religion” (NKJ). They think (at least subconsciously) that worship is all about them. Therefore, if **they** are entertained and amused, they think the worship has been great—especially since they did not have to put any effort into it.

Many sermons are boring to some for just that reason—because they made no effort to follow or comprehend it. They came with the idea of: “Here I am; now do something that holds my attention.” This notion contradicts all that we have looked at concerning the purposes of worship and the expectations God has of us. While it is true that sermons can be boring (not well arranged or thought through or not well presented) and the singing can be less than inspiring (too low or too slow), the key ingredient to meaningful worship is the attitude possessed by the worshipper.

When we meet together, therefore, we are offering worship to God and building up each other. We often stay and visit with one another so we can rejoice in the successes of our brethren and sympathize with the problems we all periodically face (1 Cor. 12:25-27). We are inter-connected, as the body of Christ, we are supposed to be. People should look at us and describe us as a family with a loving heavenly Father. Nor is Sunday the only involvement we have with each other. We are commanded: “exhort one another daily, while

it is called To day” (Heb. 3:13).

The Scriptures declare frequently the level of involvement and concern we ought to share: “Let no one seek his own, but each one the other’s *well-being*” (1 Cor. 10:24); “*Let nothing be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself” (Phi. 2:4); “through love serve one another” (Gal. 5:13b).

Furthermore, worship is not an end in itself (for us). We do come to honor God, but we are also edified, which enables us to be better Christians and better servants. Most Christians have heard Hebrews 10:25 (“not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together...but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching”), but perhaps they have not looked closely at the construction of the sentence, which begins in verse 23.

There are two primary commands: “Let us hold fast” and “Let us consider.” The first clause is an exhortation for us to be faithful, and it is based upon God’s faithfulness. The writer had previously mentioned that what God promises He keeps, because He cannot lie (Heb. 6:17-20). The second exhortation deals with our treatment of each other. Below are the two commandments as they appear in Hebrews 10:23-24: “Let us hold fast the confession of *our* hope without wavering, for He who promised *is* faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works.”

These are the commandments; the oft-cited Hebrews 10:25 informs us as to **the manner** in which those two commandments are to be accomplished by the Christian. We remain steadfast in our hope, without wavering and stir each other up to love and good works by “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together.” In other words, one purpose for our gathering on the first day of the week is to be built up in our faithfulness (edification). Bible classes and worship accomplish that goal. A close examination of the Scriptures among like-minded brethren serves as a reaffirmation of our commitment to Jesus. It also serves as an opportunity to stir each other up to things we ought to be doing—good works (Tit. 2:14)—things that are motivated by our love of God and one another.

If we only come to worship out of a sense of obligation (I know I should do it), to be entertained passively instead of being an active participant, or to get it over with so we can get back to our own life (and the plans we have made), we are missing the point of

our being together entirely.

The saints meet to show our reverence for our Creator and to become equipped “for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12). God expects all of us to be servants, but we need to be equipped for that work. The teaching and training we receive in classes and in the assembly provide a large part of what we need—if we pay heed to what is being said and done.

### 100% Pure

Because we meet to be edified, only the truth will serve. Error cannot build up anyone. False doctrine will save neither ourselves nor those who listen to us (1 Tim. 4:16). Consider a few examples. Suppose a druggist, in dispensing medicine (paid for by Medicare) decided to dilute the ingredients with some foreign substance. Do we not expect purity rather than a pollutant in our prescription? What would we think of a teacher who taught our youngsters that  $2 \times 5 = 9$ ? Would we not prefer that pure mathematics be taught instead of the inventive kind? If we receive income tax information from someone, we expect it to be accurate. (Few people enjoy being audited.) Anyone who told a taxi driver to take him to 42<sup>nd</sup> Street would probably be irate over being told he must leave the cab at 135<sup>th</sup>.

We all expect correct information when we seek it and grow upset if we are ill-advised. For some reason, however, when it comes to religion, the attitude of certain individuals is: “Just tell me anything. I don’t care.” What sort of rationale is that? It is one that either fails to recognize or is unconcerned about the difference between truth and error. It is the equivalent of saying of medicine, “I don’t know whether this bottle contains a cure or poison; oh, well. It doesn’t matter. I’ll just take it anyway.” Truth saves (John 8:31-32), and error kills, yet some are as blase as they can be concerning which one they prefer to hear. As a result of listening to false prophets (Mat. 7:15-20), many will be lost on that great and final day (Mat. 7:21-23).

False teachers tell people that it is all right to do things (usually of an immoral nature) that the Word of God forbids (Jude 3-4; 2 Pet. 2). They also deny that certain commands (such as living evangelistically) need to be observed (Mat. 28:18-20). They say things that people want to **hear** (2 Tim. 4:1-4). Not only must preachers and teachers be careful to “*speak* as the oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11), the listener also has the responsibility to demand pure teaching from God’s Word.

Besides edification the church in general and the Christian individually has the responsibility to be evangelistic and benevolent. These are unlikely attributes of those who come begrudgingly to worship and hastily depart. Such *members* remain untrained and unmotivated to serve either God or their fellow man. Some are only interested in their own salvation and do not care about the spiritual condition of others.

We truly thank God for those who are growing in knowledge and who approach Bible study and worship

with enthusiasm—another opportunity to learn and be a better servant to the Master. Not only must preachers teach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), members of the body of Christ must learn it. How much more effective would the church be if all of those who were baptized for the forgiveness of their sins would take that decision seriously! Spiritual growth cannot be considered an option when it is a necessity. All of us need teaching—edification.

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