



# The Tri-Cities Edifier

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## Non-Denominational Christianity

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Over the past several decades, one of the fastest-growing religious movements has been what is commonly called "non-denominational Christianity." Large independent churches have become increasingly popular, often emphasizing contemporary worship and freedom from denominational traditions. Many people are drawn to these churches because they perceive them as offering a more modern and less tradition-bound approach to Christianity.

Ironically, modern "non-denominational" churches have developed their own distinct identities, doctrines, leadership structures, and traditions. Although they reject the denominational labels, they often function much like denominations themselves.

The New Testament describes the church established by Christ (Matthew 16:18). It belonged to Him, not to men, and by its very nature was not a denomination. Those who were part of the Lord's church were simply called "*Christians*" (Acts 11:26), "*disciples*" (Acts 6:1), and "*saints*" (Philippians 1:1). Local congregations were autonomous, each overseen by qualified elders and served by deacons (Acts 14:23; Philippians 1:1). Their worship consisted of singing, prayer, the Lord's Supper, giving, and the teaching of God's Word (Acts 2:42; Acts 20:7; Ephesians 5:19). The pattern presented in the New Testament emphasizes Christ as the only head of the church and scripture as its sufficient guide for faith and practice. The goal should never be to build a church that reflects modern preferences or popular trends. Rather, our aim should be to become like the church we read about in the New Testament, nothing more and nothing less. If we are willing to lay aside human traditions and submit ourselves completely to the authority of Christ, we can enjoy the unity for which Jesus prayed (John 17:20–21). History has repeatedly shown that when human innovations are introduced into religious practices, division soon follows. Lasting unity cannot be achieved by compromise or by minimizing doctrinal convictions, but by returning to the teachings of God's Word.

Only when we are united in following the pattern revealed in scripture can we experience the unity God intended for the Lord's church. We invite everyone to simply become a Christian and to be part of the church that belongs to Christ, not a denomination established by men, but the church revealed in the New Testament. The Beacon 8/25/26

## The Church of Christ

Ben Torno

Humans are social animals. We love to sort ourselves into groups and cliques. To create these groups, something first has to unite us. We need to have something in common with our other group members. Fans of a particular sports team are united by a common love for that sports team. Graduates of Texas A&M and graduates of the University of Oklahoma are united by a common aversion to the University of Texas. Citizens of the United States of America are united by a common heritage and a common law.

Unfortunately, groups like this are often quite fragile. A shared love of Chelsea Football Club is not nearly strong enough to sustain a friendship through thick and thin. A shared national heritage was powerless to prevent the fracture of the Union during the American Civil War.

So what unites our churches? What do we have in common? We come from different places; we work different jobs; we're different ages. How can such a motley crew be united? What glue is thick enough to prevent our churches from fracturing?

In our New Testaments, the word translated "church" comes from the Greek word *ekklesia*, meaning "assembly." Originally, *ekklesia* was a somewhat vague term. It could be used to describe any assembly without regard to purpose, composition, or intent. It could legitimately refer to either the dignified council of Athenian statesmen or the rambunctious Ephesian mob in Acts 19:32. Naturally, the apostles felt it necessary to add a modifier to the word. They wanted to specify what kind of assembly they were talking about. It was the "assembly... in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 1:1). It was the "assembly of God that is in Corinth" (1 Corinthians 1:2). Sometimes, it was just the "assemblies of Christ" (Romans 16:4), or, as we would term it, the "churches of Christ." These early churches had their differences, yes, but they were nevertheless all "of Christ."

In 1 Peter 2:9, the apostle Peter gives a "mission statement" for this so-called church of Christ. He says, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." Within this text, Peter highlights a few factors that unite these churches "of Christ."

**The church is called by Christ.** Peter says that the church "proclaim[s] the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light." What unites the church is the fact that it was *called*. We're not assembling because we like the same sports team or even because our personalities mesh well. Instead, through our response to the proclamation of the Gospel message, each one of us has been called out of the darkness of sin into the marvelous light of Christ. We share that same origin story, a common calling.

**The church belongs to Christ.** Peter also describes the church as a "people for his own possession." He's riffing off language from Exodus 19:5, where God calls Israel his "treasured possession among all peoples." In other words, we've been bought with a price, and therefore we no longer belong only to ourselves. Human assemblies usually start falling apart when members begin to emphasize their own self-interest and desires. But if we belong only to Christ, there is absolutely no room for position-jockeying or division. We share a common belonging.

**The church is obedient to Christ.** In Exodus 19:5, right before he gets to the "treasured possession" bit, God adds a condition: "If you will indeed obey my voice...you will be a treasured possession." Israelites were united by a loyalty to a common ruler. Since God graciously redeemed Israel, it was expected that they would obey his law. The same went for the New Testament church. Right after Peter describes the church as a "treasured possession," he gives rules about how the church is supposed to behave. The solemn duty of the church is to obey her head, Christ. We share a mission, a common law.

Through membership in Christ's body, we are united not only to those in our local church but also to everyone throughout history who has named Jesus Christ as Lord and obediently followed Him. This is an eclectic and diverse bunch. It spans Christians across twenty centuries, seven continents, and countless languages. Yet, despite our manifest differences, we do have one thing in common – the one thing that truly matters. We're the church *of* Christ. Southside Pasadena, TX  
7/26/26