

DENOMINATIONS: Restorationism

Religion: the belief in a god

Denomination: a religious grouping where congregations are united in their adherence to its beliefs and practices

Synod: Greek for “walking together.” Congregations voluntarily choose to belong to a synod, which is a group of congregations that are in agreement with each other.

Basic History of Christian Denominations:

1054: “Great Schism” (Split of Orthodox and Rome)

1530: Protestant Reformation

- Lutheranism
- Calvinism
- Anglicanism
- Anabaptism

History of Restorationism

While the Creeds have been important in teaching the Christian faith, Restorationists say they have restored the Christian church to “original” or “primitive” Christianity by purging the church of what they call all non-Biblical elements, including the Creeds and confessions of faith.

Restorationism most resembles the Anabaptists of the Reformation as they attempted “to throw out the baby with the bathwater” by starting their church anew.

Rev. Thomas Campbell (1763-1854) greatly influenced what would become Restorationism. He was a Scottish Presbyterian who left his church in Ireland to come to western Pennsylvania in 1807. He was convinced that the historical Creeds and confessions of the church were a source of Christian division rather than union, and he preached that all Christians should share in the Lord’s Supper together. His views led to a censure from the Presbyterian Church in 1809, so Campbell formed his own church, the Christian Association of Washington County, Pennsylvania, and published the *Declaration and Address*, which was to become the Magna Carta of the Restorationist movement.

In the *Declaration and Address*, Campbell argued that “schism, or uncharitable divisions” in the church were “anti-Christian, anti-Scriptural, and anti-natural” and “productive of confusion and every evil work.” Campbell declared that God had spoken clearly and laid down the rules for the church practices in the New Testament: “We will speak when the Scriptures speak, and remain silent when they are silent.” With that phrase, Campbell abolished many traditional church practices, including the use of musical instruments in worship, and infant baptism. He said that only a believers’ baptism is a true baptism.

Campbell’s son, Alexander (1788-1866), was less scholarly than his father, but more dynamic and consistent in his application of his father’s principles. He fought against atheism, Mormonism,

The Lutheran Vantage Point

In this study we examine denominations from a Lutheran point of view. But we always attempt to describe their systems of teaching fairly.

When the beliefs of these non-Lutheran systems disagree with Scripture, we shall point out why such teachings cannot be considered acceptable.

On the other hand, we shall note with pleasure those teachings that emphasize beliefs also found in the Lutheran Confessions, those teachings often make applications to Christian life, etc., from which Lutherans can gladly learn.

Unitarianism, creedalism, sectarianism, emotionalism, and even slavery; but he was unsuccessful in bringing about church unity.

Another branch of 19th century Restorationism movement had its origins under James O’Kelly (1757-1826), a Methodist minister; Abner Jones (1772-1841), a Baptist; and Barton Stone (1772-1844), a Presbyterian. When the Second Great Awakening swept through Tennessee and Kentucky in the early 1800s, preaching focused on the need for conversion rather than denominational or doctrinal distinctions. Barton Stone taught that “deeds are more important than creeds.” His preaching led to a schism in the Presbyterian Church.

The groups led by O’Kelly, Jones, and Stone engaged in a long series of conferences that resulted in agreement on six basic Christian principles:

1. Christ, the only head of the Church;
2. The Bible, sufficient rule of faith and practice;
3. Christian character, the measure of membership;
4. A right, individual interpretation of the Scripture, as a way of life;
5. “Christian,” the name taken as worthy of the followers of Christ;
6. Unity, Christians working together to save the world.

By 1832, the two groups came together for a meeting in Lexington, Kentucky. Stone used the word “Christian” to designate his group, feeling that all of God’s children should be known as such. Alexander Campbell used the phrase “Disciples of Christ.” After 1832, some of the Christians and Disciples of Christ merged. Soon, differences arose among the Restorationists, and, over time, distinct fellowships emerged, most of which go by the name “Christian Churches” or “Churches of Christ” or both. Into the 20th century, they eventually began to believe that they are the only true Christians.

As a church that dislikes confessions of faith, they do confess the following:

- No Creeds just deeds.
- The Lord’s Supper is only a memorial meal, not a Sacrament. As a memorial meal, all are welcome to participate, since they abhor divisions.
- The only real baptism is a believers’ baptism by immersion that is necessary for salvation. However, Baptism is not a Sacrament.

Restorationists have an Arminian view of salvation and believe in free will.

Today, some Restorationists use musical instruments in worship. Still, most Restorationists think of outsiders as not fully Christian.

Arminian View on Salvation
Man is not totally depraved, but has a free will.
Election is God’s response to your personal decision to follow Him.
Christ died potentially for everyone, so long as you decide to accept Him.
Grace is completely resistible and is based on personal choice.
You can walk away from salvation any time you like.

Discussion Questions

1. In what way do the following Bible verses show that Baptism is God's powerful act and not merely a human act of obedience?
 - a. John 3:1-5 - _____
 - b. Titus 3:4-7 - _____
 - c. 1 Peter 3:21-22 - _____
2. What do the following Bible verses have to say about the freedom of the will when it comes to spiritual matters?
 - a. Romans 8:7 - _____
 - b. Galatians 5:17 - _____
 - c. Ephesians 2:1 - _____
3. What are Restorationists missing out on by not confessing the Creeds?

COMPARING THE CHURCH BODIES:

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)



Origin and History: The Disciples of Christ was organized primarily by Alexander Campbell and preserves the original ecumenical aim of Campbell more fully than some other Restorationist bodies. The Disciples of Christ was organized in 1849 and it grew rapidly in the 19th century, especially in the Midwest. Differences between conservatives and progressives over missionary societies and instrumental music led to the separation of the Churches of Christ by the end of the century.

In matters of belief, the church allows freedom in interpretation, stemming from the conviction that there is no creed but Christ and no saving doctrines save those of the New Testament. Faith is a matter of conviction. They do not accept the doctrine of original sin, but they do teach that all people become sinful and must be redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ. They are not concerned with speculation about the Trinity and the nature of the triune God. They have no catechism and no set orders of worship. Faith in Christ as Lord is the only requirement.

Today, with a lack of doctrine, the Disciples of Christ has become theologically liberal. The church body is in fellowship with the United Church of Christ (UCC) and the United Church of Canada.

Source of Doctrine: Personal interpretation of the Bible.

Role of Christ/Way of Salvation: The Disciples of Christ teach that believers are able to cooperate in their conversion. While they acknowledge God's role in forgiving sin and Jesus' work of obedience, they teach that Christians are enabled by sanctification to do their own holy works, which qualify them for eternal life.

Sacraments/Ordinances: No Sacraments. Baptism is believers' baptism and only by immersion. Holy Communion is a memorial meal.

Eschatology: All views acceptable.

Life Issues: No formal opinion on abortion.

Sexual Identity: In 2013, the Disciples of Christ voted in favor of affirming same-sex marriage. In 2019, the General Assembly passed a resolution affirming that transgender and gender non-confirming people are welcome in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Role of Women: The Disciples of Christ believe that all people who are baptized are called to minister to others.

Other: Jim Jones was ordained as a Disciples of Christ minister. The Disciples responded to the Jonestown mass killings with significant changes for ministerial ethics.

Christian Churches and Churches of Christ

Origin and History: Christian Churches and Churches of Christ are independent churches that reject the designation as a denomination. Until 1968, these churches were a part of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), but separated as they believed the Disciples of Christ became too theologically liberal. The Christian Churches and Churches of Christ tended toward fundamentalism.

Key doctrines include:

Divinity of Christ, authority of the Bible, indwelling of the Holy Spirit for the believer, future reward or punishment, and God as a loving, prayer-answering deity. They baptize by immersion only and observe the Lord's Supper in open communion every Sunday.

Christian Congregation, Inc.

Origin and History: Unlike many other descendants of the Restorationist movement, the Christian Congregation is pacifist and opposes all war and sectarian life. The church condemns abortion, capital punishment, and all warfare. They believe that the ethical demands of the Scripture transcend all national and racial barriers and should unite all persons in activism for peace. The church remains strong in Kentucky, North and South Carolina, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Tennessee, and Texas.

Churches of Christ

Origin and History: The Churches of Christ represent the most conservative branch of the Restorationist movement. They are located throughout the nation but are concentrated in the South and the Southwest. They do not use musical instruments in worship and are sometimes called "non-instrumental Churches of Christ."

Like other Restorationist groups, the Churches of Christ are anti-Creedal and look for a Christian union based on the Bible alone. They believe that they are directly descended from the original church founded in 33 A.D. They stress a strict adherence to the New Testament pattern of worship and church organization. Worship is simple, and they oppose instrumental music on the grounds that the New Testament did not authorize it and that the early church did not use it.

The most conservative congregations tend to believe member of Churches of Christ are the only real Christians and decline all invitations to cooperate with non-Church of Christ congregations. However, in recent years some Churches of Christ have become more open to ecumenical cooperation.