

WHAT HAVE YOU HEARD ABOUT THE CHURCH OF CHRIST?

Leonard M. Gray, Ph.D.



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Biographical Sketch

Leonard Gray, born in Silver, Texas, 1923, grew up in Carrizo Springs, Texas. He graduated from high school in May 1941, just in time for the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941. Because he said he would rather fly than walk and knowing he would be drafted by the Army, he hitchhiked to San Antonio, Texas, and joined the U.S. Army Air Corps. He became a pilot. On special assignment to the Army Air Base, Frederick, Oklahoma, he met and married Marguerite Jones, a faithful Christian lady from Tipton, a small town northwest of Frederick. The Grays now have two sons and two daughters, plus grandchildren and great grandchildren.

After having been engaged in the European Theater of Operations in the closing months of WW II, Gray came home with the idea of becoming an aeronautical engineer. Shocked at the level of morality in America's post-war culture, he said, "America needs better people more than better airplanes" so he enrolled in Abilene Christian College, Abilene, Texas, and thus began his life as a gospel preacher.

His 62 years in the ministry provided both him and his wife wide and varied experiences. Preaching for the Birdville Church, near Ft. Worth, Texas, previewed what was to come, for that fellowship was the home congregation of Eldred Echols, a missionary to southern Africa. In 1953, the Grays boarded ship for a 19-day

voyage to Port Elizabeth, South Africa. There they lived and reared their four children for the next 15 years.

Returning to Ft. Worth, they were with the Pipeline Road Church from 1968 to 1970, when they were asked by Alton Howard, an elder with the White's Ferry Road Church in West Monroe, Louisiana, to be a missionary influence in beginning the WFR School of Preaching. There Gray served as full-time instructor and director of the *Christ the Hope of the World* lectureship. Marguerite served as head of the women's program.

In 1975, Gray was called to the position of Director of the Bear Valley School of Biblical Studies. Marguerite was appointed coordinator of the program for the preachers' wives. The team served on site until Gray suffered severe malignant cancer surgery, which led to their going back into full-time local work with the Rancho Cordova Church in Sacramento, California. After five years in that service, Gray was asked by Robert Scott, head of the World Christian Broadcasting Corporation, to assist in preaching the Word on the air, a short-wave program covering over half the earth. While involved in this program, Gray and Cline Paden, fellow preachers, were among a group of eight preachers to participate in a two-week tour of China, holding discussions with theological seminars across the country. In 1990, an urgent call from South Africa persuaded the Grays to return for a two-year endeavor to "strengthen the churches" before returning to America.

Back in the US in 1992, they spent the next 14 years serving in local work in various congregations: Sanger, Texas; Archibald, Louisiana; Altus and Tipton, Oklahoma. Gray now serves as associate minister in the Tipton Church of Christ.

The Grays can look back over 62 years of involvement in mission efforts, local work, gospel meetings, special campaigns, seminars, and lectureships in Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Colorado, California, Wyoming, New Mexico, Canada, South Africa, Ghana, Trinidad, Granada, Brazil, Germany, Chili.... Their missionary services have taken them in and out of 90 to 100 countries. Gray has also preached in many of the major capitals of the world: London, Rome, St. Petersburg, Madrid, and Bangkok.

An author of numerous articles for various publications over the years, Gray has written a special series entitled *Humanism-Anti-God, Anti-Christ, Anti-Christian* for the *Christian Advocate* publication. Too, he is the author of a commentary on I, II, III John for the book, *Commentary on the New Testament in Simple English*, edited by Dr. Van Tate. Gray writes a column, *Gray Matter*, published in three city newspapers, and for the past seven years has been printed in the *Altus Times*, Altus, Oklahoma.

Recently he was filled with a need to “give a specific answer to everyone who asks me to give the reason for the hope I have”; therefore, he has written this book, *What Have You Heard about the Church of Christ?* Gray donated the book to The Sunset International Bible Institute for publishing and for creating a special trust fund: The Leonard and Marguerite Gray Preacher Training Fund.

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ENDORSEMENTS

The Church today is greatly tempted to pull up anchor and “go with the flow” of human inspiration, resulting in each man doing what is right in his own eyes. This strong current of secular “religious” thinking has set many adrift without a spiritual anchor or a *true identity*. Leonard Gray’s book addresses prominent observations made about the Lord’s church. Gray simply and clearly analyzes these observations in the light of Scripture. This book is a great resource for identifying the Lord’s Church and her practices and is a great reminder to each generation of her rock-solid identity.

Stacy Sikes

Hands of Compassion Hospital
Chaplain

Mayo Clinic, Rochester, MN

The 62 years in the ministry in churches of Christ has qualified the author to speak with confidence, experience, and precision. I have known Leonard Gray for most of all those years, while he faithfully and powerfully preached and trained others to preach. His faith has been courageous and unwavering as he labored both in this country and abroad in some 20 different countries and major cities of the world. This book is an evaluation of what he has heard from men and women far and wide who have given their opinions about the church for which Jesus died. The information will strengthen long-held truths and convictions of Christians, providing them with

“ammunition” they can use with confidence as soldiers fighting the good fight of the faith.

Alvin Jennings
Star Bible Publications

Leonard Gray’s presentation of *What Have You Heard about the Church of Christ?* is straight forward, easy to understand, concise, and well-documented with Scripture. I plan to use this book as a text in our next Bible class.

Bill Dennis, Ph.D.
Professor of Engineering
Technology (Retired)

In this book, Leonard Gray speaks to questions which are often asked about churches of Christ, and he has provided clear, scriptural answers. Both those who are members of the church and those who want to know more about the church can benefit from reading this material.

Stafford North, Ph.D.
Oklahoma Christian University

Thank you for sending me your manuscript, *What Have You Heard about the Church of Christ?* I do not know of another publication which contains all this material. The information should be helpful to those who seek to show sincere believers in Christ who have joined a denomination, thinking it was the church of Christ. You have affirmed truth without an attitude of arrogance. You have supported your affirmations with evidence. You have not only refuted error but also have affirmed truth. This book should be a good tool for those who are trying to teach the gospel to those who have been deceived by the doctrines of men.

Jimmy Jividen
Preacher and author

In a time when many churches have become timid about telling the world who we are and what we believe, Leonard Gray has come forth with this very concise, yet complete, source book of such information. The information should be widely accepted by churches for class work, by individuals for personal growth, and for use in personal evangelism.

Mack Lyon

In Search of the Lord's Way

My dear friend and co-laborer in the Gospel, Leonard. M. Gray has written a book that seeks to call members of the churches of Christ back to their heritage, while at the same time biblically and lovingly sharing with those outside the Restoration Movement as to why churches of Christ hold certain practices and beliefs. This book should be read with a Bible and with an open mind, remembering all the while Jesus said the truth will set us free (cf. John 8:32).

J.J. Turner, Ph.D.

Historically, God's people have had a tendency to drift away from His revealed guidance and direction; therefore, a need exists for constant renewal and study of Biblical teaching regarding the Lord's church and its doctrines: organization, worship, and requirements given through the Holy Spirit. Church leaders as well as all Christians need to refer to the Scriptures to assess whether or not what they believe and practice is Biblical and is ordained by Spirit-led writers. Such is the goal and purpose of this book by Leonard Gray. The material is basic in its teachings and is a reminder of what God has revealed regarding the church that Jesus lived and died to establish. All our worship and practices, especially regarding what is needed for salvation from sins, should be gleaned from

Bible authority and this is what Brother Gray has accomplished.

I had the blessing of working with Leonard Gray for many years, especially as we served the Lord together on the mission field in South Africa. I have been with him in personal teaching opportunities, gospel meetings, private studies, personal discussions, and debates. He is totally committed to New Testament Christianity and is well able to present the basic teachings of those who were inspired to write the Bible. His understanding of the church of Christ as presented in the Scripture has come from years of study, from Biblical discussions, and from conversion of lost souls to the Lord. I recommend that this material be read, studied, and used to reach lost souls with the Gospel of Christ.

R.H. (Tex) Williams

Director: World Bible School
(Retired)

Leonard Gray's experiences as a missionary, a preacher, and an educator are evident in this book. He makes every effort to speak truth in love as he responds to observations, sometimes critical and sometimes inquisitive about the churches of Christ. The author deals with 13 important comments that people make about our beliefs and practices. Both members and non-members will benefit from reading *What Have You Heard about the Church of Christ?*

Howard W. Norton, Ph.D

Professor: Harding University

I have known Leonard and Marguerite Gray and have admired and been encouraged by their ministry for forty years. They are special friends and powerful examples to all those who love God's Word, preaching, preachers, missionaries and mission work. Their long ministry has always been characterized by a love of people and of truth. In this book Leonard captures the spirit of both great loves. He answers questions that almost everyone in ministry has been confronted with and he does it in a kind, loving but Biblical manner. I commend this writing to truth seekers and soul winners everywhere. I express my sincere gratitude to these dear friends for establishing the Leonard and Marguerite Gray Preacher Training Fund at Sunset with a significant estate gift and for donating the proceeds of this book to that fund.

Truitt Adair
Executive Director
Sunset International Bible Institute

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this book is to search the Scriptures and get a clear understanding of the church as pictured in the Testament of Jesus Christ. In the process, we will respond to some of the often heard comments about the church of Christ. My intention is neither to condemn nor to judge our friends, neighbors, or relatives who are not in the church of Christ. My desire is to "be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect..." (I Peter 3:15 NIV).

I want, as did Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ, to "contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3 NIV).

Because my father was an elder in the church, I have been associated with the church of Christ all my life. Over the years, I heard many remarks made about the "Church of Christ." Some statements were good, some were bad, and some were indifferent. Sadly enough, some of the bad assertions were true.

Baptists talk about Methodists, and they both talk about the Catholics, who talk about the Protestants. Almost everyone talks about the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons. Sometimes we speak in the right way and sometimes in the wrong way. The purpose of the following pages is to give what I believe to be God's biblical answer to what many are saying when they comment, "Yes, we know about the church of Christ. They believe one must be in the church of Christ to go to heaven."

This statement gives rise to several vital areas which we must consider.

Chapter One

What the Church of Christ Is

The church of Christ is the bride of Christ. To help us understand what the church is, God pictures her this way: "For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church....This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:23-32).

The church of Christ is the household (family) of God. Paul tells us: "I am writing you these instructions . . . so that you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God. . ." (I Timothy 3:14-15 NIV). Here, God instructs us how to behave ourselves in the *church*—not in the church building, but in the *body* of Christ.

The church of Christ is the *body* to which the Lord adds everyone who is saved. The Apostle Peter said, "Repent, and be baptized, everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of your sins...Then they that gladly received his word were baptized, and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls...And the Lord added to the

church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:38-47).

Once again, God's Word says, "And he is the head of the body, the church" (Colossians 1:18).

Since God adds all who are saved to Christ's body, or church, by God's own definition, no saved people will be outside the church. Of course, God is the one who knows for sure whom He has added, but He has told us in the above Scriptures the basis on which He added to His church. Does it not necessarily follow that since Christ is the head of that church, then that church must be the church of Christ? Based on the Scripture, there must be . . . and remains . . . only one church.

Thinking of the church as the bride of Christ and the body to which the Lord adds all who are saved, we can better understand His desire that only one church be in existence for His children. The Bible helps us understand that God planned and intended only one church:

- The prophets foretold of only one (Daniel 2:44).
- Christ promised to build only one (Matthew 16:18).
- Christ purchased only one with His blood (Acts 20:28).
- The apostles of Christ established only one (Acts 2:38-47).
- Christ prayed there would always be one (John 17).

- The Testament of Christ reveals only one (Matthew 1—Revelation 22).

Looking closely at Jesus' prayer (John 17:20-21 NIV), we see Him praying that His disciples would all be *one*. Notice, Jesus said, "those that believe in me through their message." We can see that "their message" must be the message of the apostles and writers of Christ's New Testament; consequently, the only way anyone becomes a believer in Christ is "*through their message*."

Research and Thought Questions

1. Since the church of Christ is the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:22-25), how many brides does Christ have?

2. If the Lord adds all who are saved to His church, what is the condition of all who are not in His church?

Chapter Two

What the Church of Christ

Is Not

According to God's Word, the church of Christ is *not* another denomination [division] in what is sometimes called "the universal church." Denominationalism [division] is not acceptable to God. For example, Paul notes, "All the churches of Christ salute you . . . mark them that are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which you learned and turn away from them" (Romans 16:16-17 ASV). Again, he tells us: "Now I beseech you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions [denominations] among you" (I Corinthians 1:10).

Let's do a little "word" thing. What is a denomination? It is a division. Remember our early math classes? We learned to add and subtract, and later we were introduced to multiplication. About the time we thought we were "up" on everything, along came the big

problem—fractions! After that, it was common and uncommon denominators. From solving fractions, then, we can determine that when the denominator denominates, we get a denomination. In other words, when a divider divides, we get division. Now, that being true, since a denominator is a divider, when a denominator denominates, we get a division. Or, to state the obvious in another way: when a divider divides, we get a denomination.

Such a process is not only true in mathematics, but also it is true in religion, for in America, we have hundreds of denominations; every one of them came as a result of a division. Remember, God said there are to be "no divisions among you." The phrase, "among you," means among Christians. As we concern ourselves with our denominational friends and neighbors, let us remember that every word written against division among God's people was written to the churches of Christ.

In studying the history of the first century church, we find that no denominations existed—only different congregations of the one church of Christ. As a result, God had Paul say, "All the churches of Christ send greetings" (Romans 16:16 NIV).

Over the years, I have heard some of my brethren, in a superior tone, make the following statement to their denominational friends: "You are wrong in belonging to a denomination, and if you are not in the church of Christ, you are going to hell!"

This declaration is made in a wrong spirit and in a wrong attitude. We should not treat our denominational friends as enemies, for they are just as concerned about going to heaven as we are. In fact, some of them are better people than are some of us. In other words, I know some Baptists who are more dedicated to God than are some of us. And then, I know some Methodists who are better than some Baptists. Believe it or not, I also know some Catholics who are more dedicated than some Protestants.

For instance, I remember standing in St. Peter's Cathedral, in Rome, Italy, watching people line up to fall on their knees before the statue of "St. Peter," and then arise to kiss his feet. In the Cathedral of the Stairs, we watched an elderly little woman fall to her knees and crawl up the high staircase, counting her rosary beads as she went, her eyes all the while locked on the crucifixion scene at the top of the stairs. According to a nearby sign in several languages, this effort will take years from her expected suffering in purgatory. How sad

We are not here concerned with better people or more zealous people; we are here concerned with the question: "Are those in the church of Christ the only ones going to heaven?"

In his letter to the church in Rome, Paul writes, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

For, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, they have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God . . . but they have not all obeyed the gospel . . . " (Romans 10:1-16).

No one becomes a member of a denomination by obeying the gospel. To illustrate, to become a Baptist, one decides to follow Jesus, prays what is called "The Sinner's Prayer," and is then considered saved, but not a Baptist until after being baptized into the Baptist church. A Methodist becomes a Methodist by being "christened" as an infant, then confirms the action by formally joining the Methodist church, an act inherited from the Roman Catholic Church and her offsprings: the Church of England (Anglican), Episcopal, Presbyterian . . .

Look further at God's pleading with Christians: "that there be no divisions among you . . . one of you says, 'I follow Paul,' another 'I follow Peter,' and still another, 'I follow Christ.' Is Christ divided?" (I Corinthians 1:10-13).

Today, we see the same kind of division: "I follow the Pope" (Catholics). "I follow Luther" (Lutherans). "I follow Calvin (Calvinists)." "I follow Wesley" (Wesleyan Methodists)

A Quick Look at Church History

The following chart provides a quick reference to the beginning dates of some selected religious bodies. The

information is taken from *A Handbook of Denominations*, by Frank S. Mead.

33 CHURCH OF CHRIST—The church described in the New Testament as "churches of Christ" (Romans 16:16) began in Jerusalem on the first Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection (Acts 2).

330 EASTERN ORTHODOX—These churches, organized in many eastern European nations, began at various times. The movement, however, was launched when Constantine moved his capital from Rome to Byzantium.

606 ROMAN CATHOLIC—An exact beginning date cannot be determined because Catholicism gradually evolved out of changes in New Testament doctrines and practices. The year 606 marks the time when the bishopric of Rome became more dominant than others.

1517 LUTHERAN—In this year, Martin Luther registered his ninety-five theses against Catholicism, not intending to start a new church. However, the Lutheran Church became reality following the Longer and Shorter Catechism (1529), the Augsburg Confession (1530), the Smalcald Articles of Faith (1537), and the Formula of Concord (1557).

1525 MENNONITE—Began in Zurich, Switzerland.

1560 PRESBYTERIAN—The Presbyterian Church grew out of the teachings of John Calvin, which were further refined by John Knox.

1608 BAPTIST—The Baptist movement began in Holland under the leadership of John Smyth. Roger Williams led the development in Colonial America, with a Baptist church being organized in Providence, Rhode Island, in 1639. The largest Baptist organization, the Southern Baptist Convention, began in May 1845.

1614 REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA— These people, better known as Quakers, were organized by George Fox.

1708 CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN—This group started in Schwarzenau, Germany, with eight members. Under the leadership of Peter Becker, the American movement began in 1719 near Philadelphia.

1740 METHODIST—Methodist Societies began at Oxford University under the direction of John and Charles Wesley.

1783 PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL—This American version of the Church of England began in Annapolis, Maryland.

1796 UNITARIAN—Started in Boston.

1830 LATTER-DAY SAINTS—Better known as Mormons, this group was founded by Joseph Smith.

1844 SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST—Also known as Christian Science, this movement was founded by William Miller, who predicted the end of the world would come between March 21, 1843, and March 21, 1844.

1866 CHURCH OF CHRIST, SCIENTIST—Also known as Christian Science, this movement was started by Mary Baker Eddy in Lynn, Massachusetts.

1878 SALVATION ARMY—This group was started in London by William Booth.

1881 CHRISTIAN AND MISSIONARY ALLIANCE—Started in New York by A.B. Simpson.

1844 JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES—Founded by Charles Taze Russell, this religious body was known as the Millennial Dawnist until 1931.

1903 CHURCH OF GOD—Many religious bodies have used this name. The movement now counts some 200 branches.

1907 CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE—The Nazarenes began in Chicago, when groups centered in New York and New England merged with a California group.

1914 ASSEMBLIES OF GOD—Founded in Hot Springs, Arkansas.

1931 CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN— Formed by a merger of the Congregational Church and a branch of the Christian Church.

1934 EVANGELICAL AND REFORMED— Organized in Cleveland, Ohio, with a merger of the Evangelical Synod of North America and the Reformed Church in the United States.

1946 EVANGELICAL UNITED BRETHREN—
Began in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, with a union between the United Brethren in Christ and the Evangelical Church.

Now, the church of Jesus Christ, as seen in the New Testament, is CATHOLIC in that it is universal. It is also PROTESTANT in that it protests against sin. It is BAPTIST in that baptism is required. It is METHODIST in that a method is followed in life and worship. It is EPISCOPALIAN in that it originates from the word in the original Greek text for "Overseers." It is PRESBYTERIAN in that the term originates from the Greek word for "Elders." It is THE SALVATION ARMY in that it is made up of "soldiers" of Christ. It is PENTECOSTAL in that it began on Pentecost. It is EVANGELICAL in that it is evangelistic. It is CHRISTIAN in that its members are Christian.

All the above are characteristic of the church, but they are not scriptural names.

Speaking of "names," the Lord gives no single "name" or designation for His church. We do, however, find the church called or referred to as the following:

- "Churches of Christ"—Romans 16:16
- "Church of God"—Acts 20:28
- "Church of the firstborn ones"—Hebrews 12:23
- "Bride of Christ"—Ephesians 5:23
- "Body of Christ"—Colossians 1:18

If this information is not enough to get our attention, look at John 17. In this prayer, Jesus prayed that all believers would be as one (vs.11).

When we ask ourselves how we are doing in response to that prayer, we might consider God's admonitions in Ephesians 4:1-13: ". . . endeavoring to keep unity . . . one body [we have hundreds] . . . one baptism [we have at least half a dozen] . . . till we all come to the unity of the faith [we have many 'faiths']." Actually, the sin of division (denominationalism) is not only in our religious world but also in varying degrees in every religious group. Such conflict of interests results in the divisions dividing again, all because of what Jesus said, "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men . . ." Then He said, "You reject the commandments of God that you may keep your traditions" (Mark 7:7-9).

A *denomination*, therefore, is what the church of Christ is *not*.

Research and Thought Questions

1. A denomination is a division of people claiming to be Christians. Since the Lord says, “Mark them that cause division . . . and avoid them” (Romans 16:17), should we be in a denomination?
2. Understanding that the Lord tells us, “There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism . . . (Ephesians 4:5), should we have many “faiths” and many baptisms?