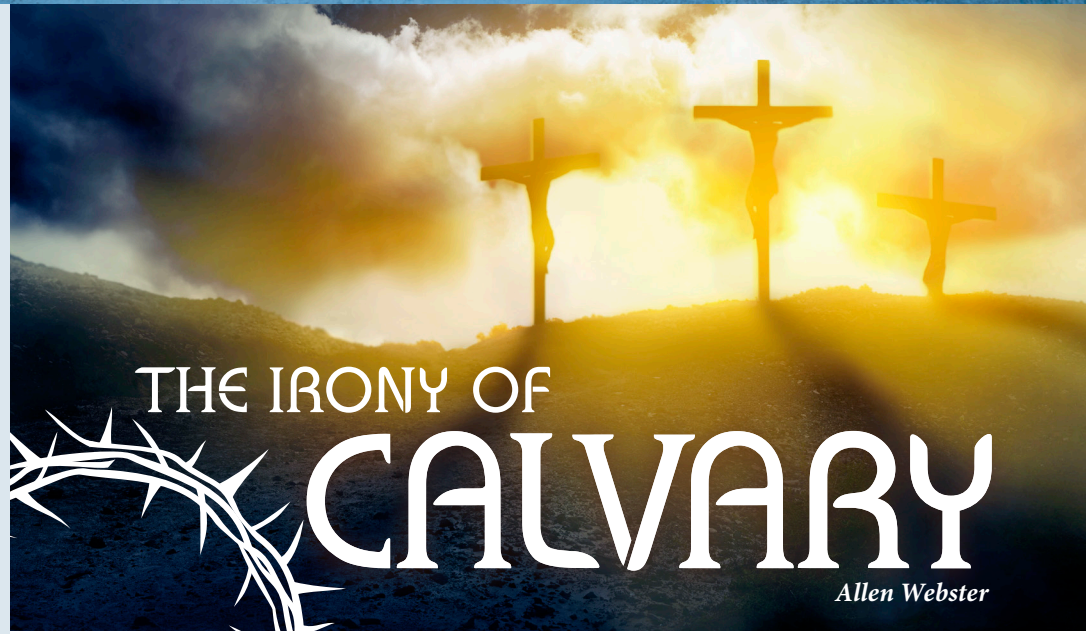


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VOLUME 23 NUMBER 2



THE IRONY OF CALVARY

Allen Webster

More has been written about Jesus' life than any other man. More has been written about His death than His life, yet the material is not exhausted. Writers can find no more appealing story, and readers never tire of the theme.

A fascinating angle to explore is the irony these events portray as we contrast Jesus' moral strength and perfect character with those people and events He encountered on the day of His death.

CHRIST, JUDGE OF ALL MEN, STOOD IN FRONT OF PILATE, A JUDGE.

He who will judge the world (Romans 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:10), knows what it feels like to be judged. The Prosecutor knows what it feels like to be the defendant. Pilate executed justice before he crucified Jesus. Jesus had inherent authority, while Pilate had only delegated authority (John 19:11; Romans 13:1-6). Jesus thus gave Pilate his authority and then submitted to it. Further, Jesus submitted to abused authority. He who needed only justice did not even plead for mercy.

Jesus, the Judge, promises to be fair and merciful to His followers (2 Timothy 4:8; Hebrews 2:17), something He did not receive at His trial. Even on earth, Jesus showed mercy to undeserving people (cf. John 8:1-11). He will say, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful . . . enter into the joy of your lord" (Matthew 25:21), to many imperfect and undeserving defendants.

Though perfect and deserving, Jesus heard no such words. He likely heard, *Illum duci ad crucem placet*. William Barclay comments, "The Roman ritual of condemnation and routine of crucifixion were fixed. They did not alter. The judge said, *Illum duci ad crucem placet*, 'The sentence is that this man should be taken to a cross.' Then he turned to the guard and said, *I, miles, expedi crucem*, 'Go, soldier, and prepare the cross.'"

Jesus knows what it feels like to have a sentence of condemnation passed down. He watched Pilate deliberate and heard him condemn. He will understand the pounding of our hearts and the sweating of our palms. He wants to take the stress out of judgment by preparing us for trial.



In fact, He pleads with sinners to repent and take Him as their Advocate before they face Him as their Judge (cf. 1 John 2:1). How interesting it will be to watch Pilate come before Jesus at the judgment that really counts.

CHRIST, FRIEND OF PUBLICANS AND SINNERS, WALKED FRIENDLESS DOWN THE CALVARY ROAD.

Jesus was accused, condemned, whipped, mocked, crowned with thorns, and rejected—all before breakfast! By 9 A.M., the soldiers had put Jesus' clothes back on Him and led Him out of town to "The Place of the Skull."

In this parade, the prisoner, usually naked (according to Barclay), was set in the middle of a hollow square of four soldiers. The cross was laid upon his shoulders, and he was pushed along the road as he staggered to the place of crucifixion. People lined the streets and jeered the victim.

Jesus—weak from loss of blood, sleep deprivation, fluid dehydration, food impoverishment, and emotional strain—had to have Simon to carry the cross after Him (John 19:17; Luke 23:26).

At this point in the story, we might expect a hundred volunteers among those He had helped during His ministry to rush to His aid, perhaps arguing over who got the privilege of helping their Master.

Yet no one stepped forward. Simon of Cyrene, evidently a stranger, was compelled to bear the cross after Christ. Jesus, always a friend to the friendless

(Luke 7:34), walked alone to Golgotha. His disciples had fled into the night (Matthew 26:56), and His acquaintances kept their distance in the morning.

CHRIST, WHOSE YOKE IS EASY, STRUGGLED BENEATH THE WEIGHT OF THE CROSS.

A Roman cross weighed about three hundred pounds, so prisoners were only made to carry the horizontal beam (*patibulum*). (The vertical *stipes* was kept on site at Golgotha.)

In His weakened condition, even this weight of perhaps a hundred pounds was too much for Jesus. It is interesting that Jesus struggled with that burden. He who made the world (John 1:10) and holds it together by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3) struggled to carry a tiny part of it. He whose curse withered a live fig tree (Matthew 21:19), withered beneath Calvary's dead tree. This points to His humanity—He set aside divine strength to die as a man.

Consider the struggle beneath this weight in light of His famous invitation to sinners: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you . . . and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:28–30).

When Jesus saw us straining under the "patibulum" of sin, He offered to take it from our shoulders and put it on His own. In fact, He did exactly that as He walked in this shameful parade down death row. He carried His cross that

we might be relieved of our burden. He was made sin for us "that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). The burden lifter became the burden bearer (1 Corinthians 5:7).

CHRIST, WHO BROUGHT JOY TO THE WORLD, WAS FOLLOWED BY WEeping WOMEN.

Jesus is pictured as a happy person who generally "rejoiced in the spirit" (Luke 10:21). He took children in His arms (Mark 9:36) and feasted with both poor and rich (Mark 2:16; Luke 7:36–50).

He brightened whatever corner of Palestine He visited. Parents were thrilled to have Him hold their babies (Matthew 19:13). Hopeless sinners left Him thinking that tomorrow was a new day (Mark 12:37). The lame walked away from Him (Matthew 11:5), the deaf got to hear His sermons (Mark 7:31–37), the blind saw His face (Mark 10:47–52), the sick got out of bed to wait on Him (Matthew 8:14–15), and grieving parents had dead children restored to them (Mark 5:41–42; Luke 7:22).

An embarrassed woman had her dignity restored (John 8); a short, hated tax collector had the King stay at his house (Luke 19); and cast-out lepers no longer needed to keep their distance when touched by His hands (Matthew 8:3). Think of all the happiness Jesus brought!

Now contrast these scenes with the one on the Via Dolorosa,¹ the first and worst "trail of tears." Tenderhearted women cried in the cross's wake (Luke 23:26–31). They were bewildered, heartbroken, drenched in sorrow. They loved Jesus so much that they could not leave Him, although each glance at His mutilated body cut them in the quick of their hearts.

Jesus did not tell them to "quit crying" (as many men would have), but, remarkably, told them to weep—only not for Him, but *for themselves*. Why? Because in AD 70, Rome would terrorize their nation. His thoughts are more with their pain yet forty years away than with His own at the present. Do not miss the irony in the fact that He who came to planet earth to bring happiness left it "acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3).

CHRIST, THE GLAD TIDINGS OF GOOD THINGS, TRAILED BEHIND AN ACCUSING PLACARD.

Jesus' favorite greeting was, "Be of good cheer" (Matthew 9:2; 14:27; Mark 6:50; John 16:33). Wherever He went, the gospel (good news) spread. He spoke more encouraging words, with more positive results, than anyone before or since.

It is interesting, then, to consider what was not said the day He died. Of all the words that could have been used of the Word (John 1:14), no formal, flowery, funeral speech was made; no careful obituary was penned; no long write-up was published and circulated; and no memorable saying was etched into His tomb marker.

The only words used—"THE KING OF THE JEWS" (Mark 15:26)—were those scratched by some soldier on a rough board and nailed over His head.

CHRIST, THE HOLY SON OF GOD, RUBBED ELBOWS WITH TWO THIEVES.

Crucifying Jesus between two known criminals was deliberately staged to humiliate the Lord. He who was better than angels (Hebrews 1:4) and as holy as God (John 10:30; Mark 1:24; Acts 2:27) was put between two men judged unfit to live among fellow humans. He who

never once sinned (Hebrews 4:15) was joined to men who sinned so often, and to such a degree, that their fellow sinners executed them.

He who never once said a common curse or cross word died with His ears full of the profane curses of one who prostituted his God-given tongue with both (Luke 23:39). He whose saliva had been used to heal (Mark 7:33; 8:23), died with the dried spit of His enemies on His face (Matthew 26:67; 27:30). He who gave away everything He ever had died between men who took what did not belong to them (Mark 15:27).

He who was "holy, harmless, undefiled" had those who were corrupt, dangerous, and tainted as His closest companions in His most passionate moments. He who was "separate from sinners" and who has "become higher than the heavens" died with those who were of the scum of the earth (phrases taken from Hebrews 7:26). What a contradiction that the holy Son of God should die with the corrupt sons of men.

What a trip it was for Jesus from Pilate's courtroom to God's throne room via a gate marked death!

Endnotes

¹ "The sorrowful way" refers to the road between Pilate's headquarters and Calvary.



Be a Leader

Some parents adopt a philosophy of letting their children follow their "natural bent." Some say, "I am not going to try to influence my child when it comes to religion. I will let him make his own decision."

One might as well reason, "I am not going to try to prejudice my garden in favor of strawberries. I am going to let the clods decide between weeds and berries."

God wants us to influence our children in the way of righteousness (Deuteronomy 6:6-9). Matthew Henry's comment on Proverbs 20:11 ("Even a child is known by his deeds, whether what he does is pure and right") is interesting. He wrote, "Parents should observe their children, that they may manage them accordingly."

Each parent must observe a child to know him. It is as natural as conceiving, carrying, and giving birth to a little one.

Once the observation is made, formulate a plan to lead the child to Christ and a righteous life (Proverbs 22:1; Matthew 6:33; Ephesians 6:4).

God's Plan for Saving Man

Divine Love: John 3:16

God's Grace: Ephesians 2:8

Christ's Blood: Romans 5:9

The Holy Spirit's Gospel: Romans 1:16

Sinner's Faith: Acts 16:31

Sinner's Repentance: Luke 13:3

Sinner's Confession: Romans 10:10

Sinner's Baptism: 1 Peter 3:21

Christian's Work: James 2:24

Christian's Hope: Romans 8:24

Christian's Endurance: Revelation 2:10



A Father's Love

Phil Littleford took his son on an Alaskan fishing trip with two other men. In a quest to find some running salmon, they flew their seaplane to a secluded bay. The fishing was everything they had dreamed.

When they finished for the day, their plane was on dry ground. The fluctuating tide left their plane twenty-three feet from the water, so they cooked some of their fish for dinner and slept in the plane. When they awoke, the tide had come in and their plane was drifting in the water. They cranked the engine and took off.

Unknown to them, one of the pontoons had been punctured and was filled with water. The extra weight caused the seaplane to crash within moments.

Everyone survived, but they had no safety equipment on board. They used their waders as floatation devices, but the frigid water was a deadly threat. The current was too strong for Dr. Littleford's twelve-year-old son.

The other two men fought their way against the tide and barely made it to shore. The two survivors looked back from shore to see Dr. Littleford and his son Mark being swept out to sea, arm-in-arm.

The Coast Guard reported that they probably lasted no more than an hour in the freezing waters. The hypothermia would have chilled the body functions and put them to sleep. Mark, with a smaller body mass, would fall asleep first and die in his father's arms.

Dr. Littleford could have made it to shore, but that would have meant abandoning his son. He chose to die with his boy.

—Patrick Morely, *The Man in the Mirror*

"As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him"

PSALM 103:13

For more material on the home and family, fathers and mothers, husbands and wives, grandparents, and family finances, go to www.housetohouse.com.

The 7 Years of a Married Cold

An article that first appeared in *Saturday Evening Post* years ago reveals a husband's reactions to his wife's colds during seven years of marriage.

First year cold: "Sugar dumpling! I'm really worried about my baby girl! You've got a bad snuffle and there's no telling about these things with all the strep going around. I'm putting you in the hospital this afternoon for a general checkup and a good rest. I know the food is lousy there, so I'll be bringing you food from Tosini's. I've already got it all arranged with the floor superintendent."

Second year cold: "Listen, darling! I don't like the sound of that cough! I've called Dr. Miller to rush over here. Now you go to bed like a good little girl just for Poppa."

Third year cold: "Maybe you better lie down, Honey. Nothing like a little rest when you feel lousy. I'll bring you something. Do you have any canned soup?"

Fourth year cold: "Now look dear, be sensible! After you've fed the kids, washed the dishes and finished vacuuming, you'd better lie down."

Fifth year cold: "Why don't you take a couple of aspirin?"

Sixth year cold: "Just gargle or something, instead of sitting around barking like a seal!"

Seventh year cold: "Would you stop sneezing! Are you trying to give me pneumonia!?"

If you are married, then do something special for your spouse today. Write a sweet note or buy a card. Pick up some flowers or a small gift.

Yes, be prepared for a response like, "What did you do now, wreck the car?"

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church" (Ephesians 5:25).

"Admonish the young women to love their husbands" (Titus 2:4).



Does the Bible Approve of Men's Creeds?

A creed is a brief authoritative statement or formula of religious belief.

Men have written many creeds over the years, the most famous being the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed. The older of these, the Apostles' Creed, was written in the second century, as the earliest historical reference to it is found in AD 190. The Nicene Creed was written by a church council convened by the Emperor Constantine in Nicea in AD 325. Since the New Testament was finished no later than about AD 96, both of these creeds came after God had completed His revelation to man (Jude 1:3).

The Apostles' Creed stresses the importance of the Trinity, with special emphasis on Christ. It did not actually come from the apostles, however, due to its late date of composition. It has been revised at least sixteen times over the years, which surely would be wrong if it actually did come from the apostles. The Nicene Creed was written to rebuke the teachings of Arius, who claimed that Christ was not equal to the Father or "of

the same substance" as the Father. These creeds, and most others that men have written, were written with the intention of simplifying basic Bible teachings for common man. The problem, however, is that human wisdom is never adequate to speak where God has not spoken in matters of religious authority.

Benjamin Franklin, a nineteenth century preacher, summed up the problem with man-made creeds. He said, "First, any creed containing more than the Bible is objectionable, because it does contain more than the Bible. Second, any creed containing less than the Bible is objectionable, because it does contain less than the Bible. Third, any creed differing from the Bible is objectionable because it does differ from the Bible. Fourth, any creed precisely like the Bible is useless, because we have the Bible. This covers the whole ground . . . A creed must contain more than the Bible, less than the Bible, differ from it, or be precisely like it. No man defends his creed on the ground that it contains more than

the Bible, less than the Bible, or is precisely like it. If a creed be not defended on these grounds, on what ground can it be defended? Certainly on no moral ground conceivable to mortal man."

Jesus warned of the hypocrisy of His day, saying, "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:8-9).

Their worship was vain because they placed the uninspired teachings of mere men over the revealed Word of God. Paul told Timothy, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The Bible itself is the only creed, the only statement of beliefs that we can follow as authoritative. No man-made creed can ever compare to Scripture. —Bob Prichard

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Bible Quiz

VOLUME 23:2

Send us your answers to receive a free Bible bookmark! We'll grade and return your questions and enclose the bookmark "The Twelve Caesars" as a way of saying thanks for spending time in the Word (quantities may be limited).

Name: _____
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Questions taken from the King James Version

Answers to Last Issue

Women of the Old Testament: 1. "Mother of all living" (Genesis 3:20); 2. Sarah (Genesis 17:15); 3. Rachel (Genesis 29:28); 4. Hannah (1 Samuel 1:20); 5. Rahab (Joshua 2:1); 6. Ruth (Ruth 1:16); 7. Jochebed (Exodus 6:20) 8. Zipporah (Exodus 2:21); 9. Delilah (Judges 16:6); 10. Esther (Esther 7:3); 11. Gomer (Hosea 1:3); 12. Jezebel (1 Kings 19:2); 13. Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:3); 14. Orpah (Ruth 1:4); 15. Lot's wife (Genesis 19:26); 16. Tamar (Genesis 38:13-30); 17. Vashti (Esther 1:9) 18. Peninnah (1 Samuel 1:4-6).



Wonderful Women

Find your answers in these verses: Proverbs 31:10; 31:26, 1 Timothy 2:9-10; 1 Samuel 1:9-11; Genesis 2:18; Luke 1:5-6; Matthew 1:16-21; Acts 18:2; Ephesians 5:22-23; 1 Timothy 5:5; Titus 2:3-4; Hebrews 11:11, 31; 2 Timothy 1:5; Revelation 2:10

1. What is the price for a virtuous woman?

2. The virtuous woman opens her mouth with _____.
3. In the tongue of the worthy woman is _____.
4. Women should profess what?

5. Who vowed if thou "will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the Lord"? _____
6. Why was Eve created? _____
7. What woman was found "righteous before God, walking in all the commandments . . . blameless"?

8. Who was chosen to become the mother of Jesus? _____
9. Who was married to Aquila? _____
10. What are wives to do to their "own husbands, as to the Lord"? _____
11. Name three characteristics of a godly mother. _____
12. What two women acted "by faith" in Hebrews 11? _____
13. Who were the two faithful women in Timothy's life? _____
14. What will faithful Christian women receive? _____

A FAMINE OF THE WORD OF GOD

The ancient prophet Amos spoke of “a famine on the land, not a famine of bread . . . but of hearing the words of the Lord” (Amos 8:11). How true in our land. We are an affluent and educated people in all things except the Word of God.

George Gallop has been conducting surveys on various religious topics for years. One revealed just how uninformed our citizenry is of the Bible. Consider:

- Less than 50 percent of adults knew that Genesis was the first book of the Bible.
- On average, teenagers can name only about three or four of the Ten Commandments.
- Over 75 percent of adults were unable to name a single prophet of the Old Testament.
- Only 34 percent among adults knew who preached the Sermon on the Mount.
- Only 35 percent knew that the Roman Empire ruled Palestine during the time of Jesus.
- Only three adults out of ten could name the four accounts of the life of Christ.

It’s little wonder that crime mounts. Confusion abounds. Values are mixed up. People call evil good, and good evil (Isaiah 5:20) because they don’t know any better.

Children pay a price for uninformed parents. In a typical day in this country, 135,000 children bring guns to school. Forty children die from gunshot wounds. Six teenagers commit suicide; 3,288 children run away from home; 211 are arrested for drug abuse; 437 are arrested for drinking while driving; 7,742 teenagers become sexually active; 2,795 become pregnant; 1,106 have abortions; 2,556 babies are born to teenagers out of wedlock.

Oh, the difference that could have been made if parents had known and taught God’s Word. Parents, children—all of us—need to awaken to a renewed study and appropriation of the Word in our hearts and lives (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

—Clarence DeLoach, Jr.

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Recommended Resource



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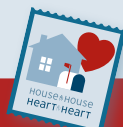


A War of World Views: Evolution vs. Christianity



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THE Autobiography OF Jesus

The closest Jesus came to writing a book while on earth was when He stooped in the presence of the sinful woman's accusers and scratched something in the dirt (John 8:6, 8). He was many things while on earth, but a writer was not one of them.

That changed when Jesus returned to heaven. According to Revelation 1:1, Jesus sent a revelation back to earth from heaven. *Revelation* (*apokalupsis*) means “an uncovering,” so you could say He is a mystery writer.

The book of Revelation is not only a revelation from Christ, but also a revelation about Christ. He is both the author and the subject. In that sense, the last book of the Bible is Christ's autobiography. In it He is the Priest-King (chapter 1), the Judge of churches (2–3), the Creator (4), the Redeemer (5), the Conqueror (6–20), and the Bridegroom (21–22). It begins with a vision of His glory, wisdom, and power (1) and ends with a prayer for Him to come quickly (22:7, 12, 20).

One of the more thought-provoking questions of the New Testament is, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?” (Matthew 22:42). Perhaps no greater block of material is found in answering the question than His autobiography. Revelation has much to say about all three persons of the Godhead, but it is especially clear in its presentation of the exalted resurrected Christ who has received all authority to judge the earth.

The Book tells us much about the offices Christ holds and the attributes He possesses. He is called Jesus Christ (1:1), the firstborn from the dead, the ruler over the kings of the earth (1:5), the First and the Last (1:17), He who lives (1:18), the Son of God (2:18), holy

and true (3:7), the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God (3:14), the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David (5:5), a Lamb (5:6), Faithful and True (19:11), The Word of God (19:13), KINGS OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS (19:16), Alpha and Omega (22:13), the Bright and Morning Star (22:16), and the Lord Jesus Christ (22:21).

A blessing awaits those who study the Book (1:3), so why not delve into it this week? It points a finger at Jesus and focuses attention on Him (John 1:37).

—Allen Webster



What Is The Church of Christ?

Church has come to mean different things to different people, depending on their association with, or knowledge of a particular denomination.

With more than three hundred different kinds of churches, it has become necessary for each to be identified by some word other than just “the church.”

This was not always so. During New Testament times, and for several centuries, there were no denominations. The church of Christ existed in its purity.

Church is first used in the Bible in Matthew 16:18 when Christ said, “On this rock I will build My church.” It occurs again in Acts 2, and from there is used often to the close of the New Testament. It literally means “the called out body.”

This body consists of people who have been “called out” of the darkness of sin and into God’s marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9). The churches of Christ advocate for the religious unity of all followers of Christ. In a divided religious world, the Bible is the only possible common basis upon which people who love God can unite.

God calls through the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14). When the apostles preached the good news of Christ, they called for people to believe and obey God’s Word. When a person did so, he was added to the Lord’s church, which was composed of the body of believers and followers of Christ. At that time, one became a member of the body of Christ, which is the church of Christ.

The Bible nowhere teaches that a person was saved and then later joined the church of his choice. Salvation and membership in the Lord’s church were obtained by the same action—obedience to the terms of Christ as stated in His gospel.

Jesus said, “He who believes and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16). This is God’s calling us through the gospel. Each apostle preached the same gospel.

The church is composed of those who wear only the name of Christ (Acts 11:26). The church consists of those who believe and teach only the doctrine of Christ (3 John 1:9–11). The church is that body of believers who obey only the commands of Christ, their Savior (Hebrews 5:9). —William Kughn (adapted for space)



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