

## Why are so many churches of Christ so small and have so few young people?

It is true that the total number of Christians who affirm that they are practicing New Testament Christianity is smaller than some of those who practice denominational doctrine. For example:

The most recent dependable estimate lists more than 15,000 individual churches of Christ. The "Christian Herald," a general religious publication which presents statistics concerning all the churches, estimates that the total membership of the churches of Christ is now 2,000,000. There are more than 7000 men who preach publicly. Membership of the church is heaviest in the southern states of the United States, particularly Tennessee and Texas, though congregations exist in each of the fifty states and in more than eighty foreign countries. Missionary expansion has been most extensive since the second World War in Europe, Asia and Africa. More than 450 full time workers are supported in foreign countries. The churches of Christ now have five times as many members as were reported in the U.S. Religious Census of 1936. <http://church-of-christ.org/who.html> .

Particularly in Texas and Tennessee, there are many congregations with hundreds and even thousands of members. The number of young people is usually proportionate to the size of the congregation. The median size of congregations is 50 members, placing half with more than 50 and half with less than 50. You are right that there are many small congregations of the church of Christ.

It is important to note what Jesus taught and the Bible says about size when speaking of numbers of members. Jesus said in Matt 18:20, "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them." The size of the church is not important, but it is important that the church truly be gathered together in the Lord's name and that the Lord be there with us. We use the name *church of Christ* because Jesus said, "Upon this rock I will build my church." Matt 16:18. His name, the Lord Jesus Christ, is so very important that it overrides any consideration of mere numbers:

- It is in his name that we have the forgiveness of sins. Acts 2:38: "Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins."
- It is in his name that we have salvation. Acts 4:12: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." Rom 10:13: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."
- It is in his name that we sing, pray, and worship. Eph 5:19-20: "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."
- It is in his name that we work and live. Col 3:17: "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."
- It is to him and the Father whom we belong. Rev 14:1: "Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads."

Perhaps there are those who would say that the church should give up some of the teaching of Jesus to attract more people. Congregations have actually done this in an effort to grow. But Jesus taught differently. He said in Matt 7:21-23:

21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"

These about whom the Lord speaks were presumptuously religious, but they did not obey the Father. One might have a huge church and still be in error. Jesus said in Matt 7:13-14, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

Another common modern practice is to think that by offering entertainment and recreation that the church will attract more people and, especially, more young people. Jesus had this same problem with the people in his day. They came to him to eat the food that he had given them. In John 6:25-40, Jesus clearly made the difference between those who accepted him and those who came for food:

25 When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

26 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. 27 Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."

May you commit to the practices taught by Jesus and his apostles and holy prophets, and do so regardless of the size of the church. Jesus had to confront people who believed on him but would not confess him because they were worried about what people would think: "Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; 43 for they loved praise from men more than praise from God. John 12:42-43.

It is a mistake for us to become enamoured with size, numbers, entertainment, and social approval and forget the master whom we serve.