

International Church of Christ

Mark Edward Sohmer
mark@sohmer.net
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“Prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

“Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (1 Timothy 4:16).

“But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:8)

One of the first questions that might be asked when studying the International Church of Christ (ICOC) is: why do we label them a cult? They teach the Trinity, hold to 66 canonical books of the Bible, talk about faith and a relationship with Christ, etc. etc.

The purpose of this essay is to show that the International Church of Christ (also known as: Boston Church of Christ, Granite State Church of Christ, Campus Advance, and more) is in fact a group with teachings that contradict the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is my prayer that this essay, although merely an introduction to the topic, will equip and edify those who hold to the gospel of grace, and may it challenge those who assert otherwise.

Short History of the Group:

1967: Chuck Lucas began working with the 14th Street Church of Christ in Gainesville, FL. The church eventually built a new building, and named it *Crossroads Church of Christ*.

It was during a time of growth and turmoil that a University of Florida student, Kip McKean, was

converted and trained by Chuck. After leaving Gainesville, Kip tried to start other discipling ministries. He encountered opposition¹.

Excerpt from letter dated April 4, 1977, from the Memorial Church of Christ in Houston to Heritage Chapel in Charleston, Ill. The letter “terminates” support for McKean and another man.

“...Brother McKean has brought un-Biblical practices, peculiar language and subtle, deceitful doctrines to Charleston from the Crossroads Church at Gainesville, Florida.”²

Fourteen points of departure from Church Doctrine were cited among which were:

“...[un-Biblical method of] confession of sins, peer pressure to conform to human judgmental standards and intimidation... The judgment of humans that mature knowledge must be gained before one is allowed to be baptized... elitism³.”⁴

1979: Lexington, MA. Kip, aged 25, moved to this suburb of Boston with wife, Elena, to work with Crossroads ministry. He would eventually take over the Crossroads ministry.

1982: began planting “pillar churches” in key areas like Chicago and London.

1988: Gainesville FL Crossroads Church of Christ “officially disassociated” itself from the Boston group.

2002: Kip McKeon resigns as head of the ICOC due to personal sins. Later heads Portland Church.

2003: Henry Kriete, leader of London Church of Christ, writes public letter “Honest to God” criticizing ways of the ICOC: (<http://www.reveal.org/library/stories/people/hkriete.htm>).

2005: Boston Elders write open letter asking people to pray for Kip’s repentance, and that they should not follow his lead.

A study of the ICOC will show the reluctance of the organization to put anything in writing. This allows them to teach one thing publicly and teach another thing privately. Many who have tried to research the organization have found that their doctrine is difficult to pin down. This itself should strike us as odd. The magazine they do publish is called *Upside Down*. The only way to really know what they teach is to be in their church and be part of their authoritative discipleship program. At that point, it is difficult to make an objective decision.

The ICOC teaches their message through an authoritative discipleship hierarchy. Total submission to *human* disciplers is expected without question. Otherwise, the disciple is looked at as disobedient to Christ. Discipleship strays into areas such as which school classes to take, career choice, whom to date, marry, etc.⁵

The ICOC Authoritative Hierarchy

- top → director: Kip McKean⁶
- lower → elders: Al Baird, Bob Gempel
- lower → evangelists: Gordon Ferguson

If the leader commands one to do something, even if it is not “Christ-like,” the member must submit!

Remember what the Word of God says, “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5).

The truly heretical and dangerous doctrine is called **Baptismal Regeneration**. Not only heretical, this slaps in the face the grace offered by our Lord Christ, and adds to the gospel, which we are commanded not to do.

The ICOC teaches that salvation follows this pattern: faith, repentance, confession, and water baptism.

If someone is already baptized, he/she must be re-baptized by the ICOC. The old one was false. One needs to be baptized with *faith that the water is removing the sin*, and thus, the water is necessary for salvation.

Gordon Ferguson explains, “If we are not doing what disciples are commanded to do, we are not saved.” It is this scare-tactic-like attitude that prevails throughout this church.

The ICOC points to Acts 2:37-38:

Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. (emphasis mine)

Looks pretty convincing-- at first. I mean, the text does say that you must be baptized to be saved. Or does it?

One problem here is that we’re looking at an English translation. The original Greek word translated “for” is “eis”, (Greek: εἰς), which most often translates to “into.” But it can legitimately be translated other ways.

Luke uses the same word (eis) in the same book, Acts 27:6: “There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for (eis) Italy and put us on board.” Here, the “eis” means “towards”. It can also mean, “to,” “into,” “in order for” or “because of.”

This works in English as well. The word “for” has many different meanings. Think of it this way: If you were driving on Interstate 95 at 85 mph when a policeman stopped you and gave you a ticket **for** speeding, how is the word “for” used in that sentence?

Did you get a ticket *to* speeding? *into* speeding? *in order for* speeding? or *because of* speeding? I think we’ll all agree that the correct meaning of “for” in that sentence is “because of.” You got a ticket (because of) speeding. Though “for” can legitimately have other meanings, in that context any other meaning would not make sense.

It is the same situation with the Acts verse. The ICOC uses the meaning “in order for” the

forgiveness of your sins. But couldn't it also be "because of" the forgiveness of your sins?" Just like you got a speeding ticket "because of" speeding, in the same way we repent and are baptized because of the forgiveness God has already given us by grace through faith. With this interpretation, God's forgiveness comes before our works. And if forgiveness came after works, then we would not be saved by grace. Scripture teaches that we are saved by grace, not works (Ephesians 2:8-9). And speaking about salvation, Paul says: "And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work" (Romans 11:6). And it is important to note that Abraham was reckoned righteous before his works (Romans 4:10).

The Bible is clear: Grace + Works ≠ Grace!

If we were to be honest, we'd say that at best, this verse, which is held together by one small Greek word (*eis*), is unclear. We must find interpretations consistent with Scripture. The issue at this point is unsettled. It's not perfectly clear yet. Let's move on and see what happens.

The ICOC might throw at you 1 Peter 3:20-21: "...when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (emphasis mine).

The ICOC will say that the water saved Noah. But that's not true! Check the text. The water saved Noah from the evil of the world, but not saved him from his sins. Noah was declared righteous before the flood, and before the boat was even built! It is for this reason that Noah was even allowed in the arc in the first place. Their connection of water baptism saving you from your sins being like Noah being saved by the water is blatantly out-of-context and incorrect.

They might also throw Romans 6 at you. This is the chapter that compares baptism with a burial with

Christ. They say that you must be submerged under water to symbolize this. But remind them that Paul also said in Galatians 2:20 that he was crucified with Christ and that he no longer lived. But Paul was never crucified! He is obviously speaking in a Spiritual sense. He was Spiritually crucified with Christ - and so are we! We also have been Spiritually buried with him, just as it says in Romans 6. It is a far stretch to say that Romans 6 teaches that water baptism is necessary for salvation.

A word about Biblical interpretation:

"Unclear passages in the Bible must *always* be interpreted in light of clear ones." Or said another way, "a verse without verses can be perverse."

An Exercise:

Read throughout the whole New Testament and ask the following questions:

- What is clear about water baptism? Where was it said? How often? By whom? To whom?
- What is said about faith and salvation and eternal life?
- What is the clear teaching about the road to Heaven?

Let's start with 1 Corinthians 1:17: "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect."

It is clear that Paul makes a distinction between the gospel and baptism; a distinction the ICOC will not make. The Bible teaches that water baptism is associated with the gospel, but it is **not** part of the gospel.

A Dry Salvation!

The story of Cornelius is one of the strongest arguments against the ICOC's formula for salvation. The account of Cornelius is key because it is written in the same book as the controversial command given by Peter (Acts 2:38 – see commentary above). Cornelius received the Holy Ghost and showed gifts of the Spirit **before** he was water baptized.

Acts 10:44-47 reads:

“While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?” (emphasis mine).

It is clear that Cornelius and the other Gentiles had received (past tense) the Holy Ghost, the promise of what is to come (Ephesians 1:13-14), but were **not yet baptized in water**.

This is significant because if the ICOC were right, then this would be a blatant contradiction, rendering the whole Bible false! Either Jesus' death and resurrection is enough, or none of it is true. How could Cornelius have been baptized with the Holy Ghost and **not** water if the ICOC were correct about water baptism? They are obviously mistaken. They are teaching another gospel.

Also, *a command does not constitute a prerequisite for salvation*. There are many clear and consistent verses about salvation. Let's just look at a few and interpret the unclear verses in light of the clear ones.

“In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory”
Ephesians 1:13-14.

“Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no

longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ”
Galatians 3:24-27.

What is being discussed here is the baptism of the Holy Spirit through faith. This occurs at the moment of saving faith. Even John the Baptist (the famous water-baptizer) said “I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost” (Mark 1:8). There is a distinction made, and it is made in each of the four Gospels: (Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16, John 1:33).

Don't forget the clear teaching of Scripture.

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.” John 6:47.

If belief were not enough, then the Lord Jesus would be a liar.

“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.”
Romans 10:9.

“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”
Romans 10:13.

“Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.”
2 Corinthians 1:21-22.

No mention of water baptism in these verses. How odd if it were necessary for salvation, yet not mentioned.

Paul talks again of the baptism of the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:13:

“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free;

and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.”

In the book of Acts, chapter 16, and verses 30 and 31, Paul’s jailer asked what he must do to be saved. Let us ask: Is water baptism preached? The Apostles emphatically and authoritatively answered, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” Either Luke forgot about the water baptism part, or it is not an intricate part of the gospel that Paul preached.

I’d like to add some thoughts by Joseph T. Adams:

Baptism is clearly commanded in the New Testament, along with other works such as abiding in Christ, loving one another, assembling together, and persevering until the end... If one asks “is baptism commanded by God” the clear answer is yes; however, to ask “is baptism required for salvation” is a question the Bible neither asks, nor answers to the satisfaction of all committed Christians. It is like asking, “Is assembling together required for salvation?” “Is loving one another required for salvation?” “Is avoiding [insert favorite sin here] required for salvation?” Once we even ask these kind of questions, we cannot give an answer which is wholly based on Scripture. Why? Because the un-stated premise underlying such questions - that human works can save - is itself contrary to Scripture.

Scripture teaches that belief in the Lord Jesus is necessary and sufficient for salvation. Necessary meaning that belief is needed to be saved, and sufficient meaning that **nothing else is needed!**

If the ICOC is right about water baptism, then the Apostles are guilty of consistently leaving out an essential part of the Gospel.

The Holy Spirit does not need to wait for water baptism. That teaching adds to the gospel.

A former member of the church testified: “Submission meant blind obedience to theirs and your discipler’s advice; otherwise one was branded weak spiritually and rebellious.”⁷

The Boston Church of Christ teaches that:
loss of ICOC status = loss of salvation.

Disobedience to human disciplers means threat of loss of ICOC status.

To the bullied ICOC *disciple*, to walk away from the ICOC is like walking away from God.

Jesus promised eternal life based on what HE had done. The devil confuses this every single time. The Word of God promises: “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that **ye may know** that **ye have eternal life**, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God” (1 John 5:13).

It’s that simple. We who know Jesus can **know** that we **have** eternal life. You can’t have eternal life for a while and then not have it. Can you imagine someone saying, “Yeah, I had eternal life for ten minutes?” What’s so eternal about that?

The ICOC teaches that walking away from them is walking away from eternal life; They’re changing the gospel and so is anyone else or any other group that teaches that you can’t know that you are saved or that you can lose your salvation. It’s as if we were saved by grace but then walk by works and remain by works. Let’s call it what it is: un-Biblical! Salvation is not a mortgage. It’s not like Jesus paid up front and then we pay for the rest of our lives. Biblical grace is not like that.

The Bible teaches that Jesus paid up front and that is the end of it. “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit” (1 Peter 3:18). “And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have

everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:39-40).

I Will Build My Church!

In Matthew 16:18, the Lord Jesus Christ promised to build his church “and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Before he ascended, he told his twelve church-builders, “lo, I am with you *always, even* unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:20).

I think at this point it is fair and appropriate to set down a Biblical definition of the “church” so we’ll be on the same page when we use that word. Jesus said “upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). That’s a significant promise. There may be some, like the ICOC, that teach that Christ’s church had completely apostatized, but the scriptures promise otherwise.

Jesus’ church is built on Jesus, and everyone who names him as Savior is part of the church (Romans 10:9.) The Bible goes on to teach that Jesus’ church is the “pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15).

What About The Church?

Now that we have a Biblical definition of the church, we must apply to it the promise of our Lord Jesus Christ. He said “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).

The *International Church of Christ* was started in the 20th century. One must ask: Where was Kip McKean in 1879? How about 1579? What about 379?

The Bible teaches that God established his church, called it “the pillar and ground of the truth,” (1 Timothy 3:15), and promised that “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). The church would never go away, yet the *International Church of Christ* makes the bold and un-Biblical claim that the church had gone away and that it was up to Kip McKean and a few others to re-discover the lost true doctrines of the Bible.

Kip McKean’s 20th century ICOC ignores that fact that God promised to preserve His true church throughout time. The 20th century ICOC is wrong to say that it is the true church, just as Joseph Smith was wrong in the late 19th century to say that his church was the true church, and just as the Roman Catholic Church, (which has its roots with Constantine in the 4th century), is wrong to claim that it is the true church. The true Church of Christ is not to be established hundreds of years after Christ. Christ said that his church would last.

I am very pleased to proclaim that the Biblical doctrine of salvation by grace through faith alone has always been taught by Christ’s true church throughout the centuries since the Lord Jesus first appeared. The teachings of the ICOC, (the necessity of water baptism and intrusive discipleship), is unique to McKean in the tail-end of the twentieth century. How impossible, based on scripture, for Christ’s church to disappear until then!

And not only has salvation by grace through faith alone been upheld by Christ’s church, but it is clearly a Biblical position, as this essay has shown.

The true church protects us from new and false doctrines leading us astray. The apostle Paul wrote that he desired that we “*henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men” (Ephesians 4:14). When Kip McKean came along in the late 1970’s and organized the ICOC, proclaiming all other churches false, we could say “No!” The church of the living God did not disappear for 1900 years, only to be rediscovered. We must ask: where was the ICOC for the last 2,000 years? Certainly there have been those from time to time who taught baptismal regeneration, but there has never been any long-lasting organization spanning back to the apostles that taught what the ICOC now teaches. Yet the Bible promises that Christ’s church will always exist. Jesus said, “lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:20, emphasis mine).

The ICOC is a dangerous cult. The organization may appear harmless at first, but that is merely because of its tendency to hide the deceptive doctrine. ICOC members often have a lot of zeal, but the issue is not zeal. The issue is truth.

Those who attend the ICOC and question the doctrine and methods are accused of being rebellious. The ICOC uses fear to silence its members. This fear tactic is consistent with other cults that also pervert the Gospel of Christ. "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8).

I hope this info has been helpful. This essay is intended to be a help to those who encounter the ICOC, as well as those who are tied to the ICOC by fear. Cults use fear to keep members, while Christ uses love to maintain His church. 2 Timothy 2:15 says, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." It is very important to remember 1 Peter 3:15, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear."

Let us sanctify the Lord God in our hearts, and should God open the door for us to talk with someone in the ICOC, let us speak the truth in love, as well as stand up for the Gospel of Christ. Remember, the people with whom we are speaking are lost, not evil. They are deceived just as we once were before Christ changed our lives. The exciting news is that Christ can use us to change their lives as well. Speak to the ICOC confidently and gently. God's love is big enough for them too. Go give 'em heaven!

My prayer is that the truth of Christ will become evident to more and more people. Ephesians 2:4-5 tells us that God saved us because He loves us. 1 John 3:1 tells us that because of His great love, we have become children of God. We are God's adopted children, the Bible tells us. Like any good parent, God does have commands for us for our own good. One of them is baptism. If you love Christ and

have trusted Him for your salvation - be assured that you are saved! But you should be baptized soon. Not in order to gain your forgiveness, but because of your forgiveness. Here is the good news: You are forgiven if you have trusted Christ.

"Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" (Acts 10:47).

Resources:

<http://watchman.org/>
<http://www.christiananswers.net>
<http://www.rickcross.com/groups/icc.html>
<http://www.reveal.org>
<http://www.carm.org>
<http://www.equip.org>
<http://www.cultsoncampus.com/newsonicoc.html>
<http://www.apologeticsindex.org>
<http://cults.sohmer.net>

End Notes:

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- ¹ Cannon, Stephen F. *The Boston Church of Christ, Has Mind Control Come to Beantown?*
 - ² Delbert Burkhardt, Elder, Letter to Heritage Chapel Church of Christ, dated April 14, 1977.
 - ³ *ibid*
 - ⁴ Cannon
 - ⁵ Yeakley, Flavil Jr., *The Discipling Movement*, Phoenix, AR, 1987, P. 55
 - ⁶ As of 2002, Kip is no longer Director.
 - ⁷ Gray, Karen, *Former Member Exposes Cult*, The Wellesley News, Wellesley, MA, Sept. 18, 1987, P. 3

All Scripture quoted from the King James Bible.

The latest version of this document can be found at:
<http://www.sohmer.net/media/ICOC.pdf>