

International Church of Christ

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“Test everything; hold fast what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

*“Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers”
(1 Timothy 4:16).*

“But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to 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, International Christian Church, and more) is in fact a group with teachings that contradict the Biblical 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. Once a person is personally involved and invested, and then they find out the unbiblical

doctrines, it is difficult to make an objective decision to leave.

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

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

2 Churches: One Heresy:

The events of 2002 cannot be overstated. The ICOC’s Founder and Leader, Kip McKean, left the ICOC and, in 2006, started a new Church Movement. This is Huge!

The International Church of Christ came to reject McKean’s heavy-handed discipleship program, and they should be lauded for that. But **the ICOC did not reject their false gospel, and still teach this heresy today.**

McKean went on to form a new movement in 2006, called, The International Christian Church. The International Christian Church also goes by other names, commonly taking up the location of where they are, like “The City of Angels Christian Church” in Los Angeles.

So whether one comes across a member of the original ICOC, or the new ICC, the main problem is still the same. **Both the older International Church of Christ, and the newer International Christian Church, both hold to the heretical and dangerous doctrine called *Baptismal Regeneration*.**

Baptismal Regeneration is incompatible with the grace offered by our Lord Christ, and is, as Galatians 1:8 warns against, a “gospel contrary” to the Biblical saving gospel.

Please note that for the purpose of this essay, the acronym “ICOC” will be used to reference BOTH the older International Church of Christ, and its many alternate names, as well as the newer International Christian Church, and its many alternate names.

The ICOC’s “Baptismal Regeneration” teaches that salvation follows this pattern: faith, repentance, confession, water baptism, and then salvation. Only after being correctly water baptized (more on that later) is someone truly saved.

The ICOC teaches that if someone were 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.**

ICOC Evangelist 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 cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (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: εις), 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? We can 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 Acts 2:38. 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.

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.

Scripture teaches that we are saved by grace, not works. “For **by grace you have been saved through faith**. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, **not a result of works**, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9, emphasis mine).

Regarding salvation, Paul writes: “But if (salvation) is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace” (Romans 11:6). And it is important to note that Abraham was seen as righteous **before** his works (Romans 4:10).

The Bible is clear: Grace + Works ≠ Grace!

The ICOC might throw at you 1 Peter 3:20-21: “...when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,” (emphasis mine).

The ICOC will point out that the water saved Noah. But that’s not true! Check the text. The water saved Noah from the evil of the world, but did not save 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 ark in the first place.

When the ICOC connects water baptism saving you from your sins being like Noah being saved by the water, they are viewing that passage blatantly out-of-context and incorrectly.

The ICOC also often uses Romans 6 to attempt to prove *Baptismal Regeneration*. Romans 6 compares baptism with a burial with Christ. The ICOC will say that you must be submerged under water to symbolize this. But they must be reminded that Paul also wrote in Galatians 2:20 that he was crucified with Christ and that he no longer lived. But Paul was never literally crucified! Paul was 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.”

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 did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel.”

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). Please note that **Cornelius received the Holy Spirit and showed gifts of the Spirit before he was water baptized**. This would be

impossible if the ICOC were correct on Baptismal Regeneration.

Acts 10:44-47 reads:

“While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, “Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” (emphasis mine).

It is clear that Cornelius and the other Gentiles had received (past tense) the Holy Spirit, 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 Spirit 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 him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guaranteed of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.”
Ephesians 1:13-14.

“So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many

of you as were 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 have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (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.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.” John 6:47.

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

“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Romans 10:9.

“everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”
Romans 10:13.

“it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.”
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 in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of 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 in the Lord Jesus, and you will 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.

The Paradox of the ICOC Gospel:

One former member shared with me that he left because he discovered the paradox of the ICOC protocol for salvation. Consider the following.

1. The ICOC teaches that one is not filled with the Holy Spirit until one is baptized in water.
2. The ICOC teaches that only those who they consider to be true Disciples can be water baptized.
3. Only those whom the ICOC considers to show "fruit of the Spirit" can be water baptized.

Therein is the paradox. According to the ICOC's false gospel, a person needs to show external proof of the

Holy Spirit in their life in order to be water baptized. But also according to the ICOC, one does not receive the Holy Spirit until he or she is water baptized.

The paradox is that the ICOC demands that an unsaved person (someone without the Holy Spirit) must show "fruit of the Spirit" in order to get the Holy Spirit! This is a recipe for religious hypocrisy!

Sure, an unsaved person can appear to display external good works. Mormons, Muslims, Atheists, and more can all display good qualities and strong character, but still be unsaved and not have the Holy Spirit within them.

By forcing unsaved people to "appear on the outside" to have fruit of the Spirit before they're allowed to be saved by water, the ICOC is creating legions of people not unlike the Biblical Scribes and Pharisees. Of them, the Lord Jesus warned, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness" (Matthew 23:27). This is very serious.

Baptismal Regeneration is a Great Way to Control People:

A second danger of the doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration is that it is a powerful tool to control people.

The ICOC teaches that salvation doesn't merely come from water baptism, but water baptism in their church, by them. And your salvation is dependent on you staying with them. This is a powerful tool for manipulation.

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."⁶

The ICOC 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: “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that **you may know** that **you have** eternal life” (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 suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18). “And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:39-40).

I Will Build My Church!

In Matthew 16:18, the Lord Jesus Christ promised, “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Before he ascended, he told his church-builders, “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (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 “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 buttress 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 buttress 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 and 21st century ICOC ignores that fact that God promised to preserve His true church throughout time. The 20th 21st 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 Mormon 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 tale-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 may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes"* (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, *"I am with you always, to the end of the age"* (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 even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to 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, *"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth"*

It is very important to remember 1 Peter 3:15, *"in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for*

a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect."

Let us honor 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, because of Christ, and not dependent on water baptism or any religious work.

If you're currently a member of the ICOC, please leave this dangerous church for the sake of your spiritual wellbeing and for the glory of God. I've met with enough people who have left to know that it's so hard because of the personal bonds made there. The ICOC is filled with people you love and care about, and leaving must seem horrifying. But you must leave because the ICOC is teaching the wrong gospel.

Please find and attend a Biblical Church that teaches salvation by grace through faith apart from any religious works.

Resources:

<http://watchman.org/>
<http://www.christiananswers.net>
<http://www.reveal.org>
<http://www.carm.org>
<http://www.equip.org>
<http://www.apologeticsindex.org>
<https://resources.luke-15.org>
https://luke-15.org/baptismal_regeneration/

End Notes:

- 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 Gray, Karen, *Former Member Exposes Cult*, The Wellesley News, Wellesley, MA, Sept. 18, 1987, P. 3

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