

# THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

by

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## INTRODUCTION

Every one of us knows how much confusion we experience today in regard to the number and diversity of religious groups. There are thousands of religious groups that profess to be the one true church. How, then, can we know which church is the **one true church**? The answer is simple: We can go to the Word of God for the answer. Studying the Bible is how you and I can know which church is the one true church described in the New Testament. Learning exactly which church is the one about which the New Testament speaks can prevent us from being deceived. If every religious group would obey God's Word, there would be only one church, not many.

Let us observe what the sacred Scriptures have to say about the one true church. Please be sure to have your Bible readily available so that you can read the passages that we will be analyzing. I encourage you to put into practice the teaching of Acts 17:11, where we are taught the importance of searching the Scriptures to see if the things we are being taught are true. I also encourage you to read 1 Thessalonians 5:21, where Paul tells us to "Prove all things and hold fast that which is good." From 1 John 4:1, we learn about how important it is to study the Bible, due to the fact that there are so many false teachers who deceive people. I am sure that you do not want to learn what **I** think, believe, or feel. Rather, you want to know what **God says** in His Word.

## THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CHURCH

From Acts 2 we learn that the New Testament church had its beginning in approximately A.D. 30. In this chapter we can read about the establishment of the church—the church about which Daniel had prophesied (Dan. 2:44). Daniel said that the church/kingdom was going to be established "in the days of these kings"—that is, in the days of the Roman Empire. We also learn from Isaiah 2:1-3 how the house of God would be established in Jerusalem. The church is known as the "house of God" (1 Tim. 3:15). In Acts 2 we read about the establishment of the church in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost when the apostle Peter stood up to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the very first time. On that day, with the coming of the Holy Spirit, the church was established. Denominations—which were established by men, not by Jesus Christ—were established many years later. In the Bible, we can read about the establishment of the church according to the prophecies of the Old Testament. Therefore, how can we find out **which** church is the **New Testament** church? Again, the answer is simple: We do this by reading and studying very carefully the prophecies of the Old Testament that pointed to the establishment of the church during the time of the Roman Empire.

## THE FOUNDER OF THE CHURCH

Another way we can learn which church is the New Testament church is by looking at the Founder of the church. The Founder of the New Testament church is Jesus Christ. In Matthew 16:18, Christ said, "Upon this rock I will build **My** church...." Notice that He said "**My church**" (singular), not "**My churches**" (plural). In Ephesians 2:20, Paul said that Christ is the Founder of the church. The Founder of the church was not Abraham, Noah, John the Baptizer, John Wesley, Martin Luther, or Joseph Smith, but Christ, the Son of God. He is the Founder of the New Testament church, the church of Christ. He is the One Who bought the church with His own

blood (Acts 20:28), and as such, He is the Savior of the church (Eph. 5:23). When we understand Who the Founder of this church is, it can help us learn about the one true church.

### THE WORSHIP OF THE CHURCH

Another way to learn which church is the New Testament church is by studying how the church worships. The Word of God speaks of five separate activities of worship in which Christians, as members of the church, must engage. Christians are to:

- Sing to the Lord (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; 1 Cor. 14:15). Members of the New Testament church do not use instruments of music when they worship God because such are not authorized by the New Testament. There is not a single passage of Scripture in the New Testament that we can read in order to obtain authority for the use of instruments in worship. Instead, the Bible says that we are to sing.
- Pray (1 Thess. 5:17; 1 Tim. 2:8; Rom. 12:12; Col. 4:2).
- Preach the Word of God (1 Pet. 4:11; Acts 2:42; 2 Tim. 4:2).
- Observe the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:27; Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 11:23ff.). Christians observe the Lord's Supper **every** first day of the week, not just a few times a year. It is on every first day of the week that Christians remember the death of Jesus Christ, because this is what the Word of God authorizes.
- Give of their means every first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 8-9). The New Testament does not authorize tithing. Rather, Christians are to give as they have prospered.

These are the five activities of worship that members of the New Testament church practice. We can learn which church is the New Testament church by studying the beginning of the church, her Founder, and her worship. We also can learn which church is the New Testament church by studying the divine organization of the church.

### THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH

The church consists of preachers, ministers, or evangelists (who are essentially the same, since the task of these men is to preach the Gospel—Eph. 4:11; 2 Tim. 4:2). The church also has elders, bishops, pastors, or shepherds (four different designations for men who do the same type of work). These men must meet certain qualifications (set forth in 1 Timothy 3:1-6 and in Titus 1:5-11) in order to carry out their work. These men take care of the church (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1ff.) and watch for the souls of the saints (Heb. 13:17).

The church also has deacons. The qualifications for these men are set forth in 1 Timothy 3:7-13. The New Testament church also has members, who are called "Christians." They do not wear manmade names like the ones we hear about today among denominations. The Bible teaches that those who follow Christ are to be called simply Christians (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16). If we are Christians, then we must wear Christ's name, not the names we hear in the various denominations. If you wear any name other than the one the Bible authorizes, then you are not a part of the New Testament church. By studying the organization of the church, we can learn about the one true church that is described in the New Testament.

### THE NAME OF THE CHURCH

We can learn about the one true church by studying the name by which it is identified. The Bible calls the church "the church of Christ" (Rom. 16:16). Why does the Bible use the name "church of Christ"? Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, "I will build **My** church." Christ said that it was **His** church—the one He bought with His own blood (Acts 20:28). He is the Savior of the church, which is His body (Eph. 5:23). The church is the church of Christ because it belongs to Him. The

church does not belong to John the Baptizer, Noah, Abraham, or anybody else. The church also is known as the church of God (1 Cor. 1:2). The church must have a biblical designation for its name. Many people today claim that the name of the church is unimportant. But, if we reason about this, we can see quite easily that names are **very** important. If your wife was about to have your baby, would you consider naming your son Judas Iscariot? I am sure that you would not do such a thing because, after all, a name **is** important. The New Testament church must wear the name of Christ because it belongs to Him. He suffered and died for the church, and to Him belongs the honor and glory.

## HOW TO BE A MEMBER OF THE CHURCH

How can a person become a member of the body of Christ (the church of Christ)? Let us consider what the Bible teaches. In Acts 2:22-47, we read about how the apostle Peter preached the Gospel for the first time. Peter explained to those who were present on that occasion that they had killed the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ. When they acknowledged that they had crucified Jesus, they asked the apostles what they could do to resolve this problem. Peter told them that they needed to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins (vs. 38). Later, in verse 41, we learn that approximately 3,000 people were baptized, and were added in this manner to the church of Christ (vs. 47). Notice that the ones who obeyed the Gospel (which Jesus had commanded to be preached), and those who obeyed it and were baptized (Mk. 16:15-16), were the ones who were being added to the church of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, Paul tells us what the Gospel is. The Gospel consists of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is the message about which we read in Acts 2:22-24, 31.

In order for a person to be saved and added to the church of Christ, a person must: (1) hear the Gospel of Christ (Rom. 10:17); (2) believe in Jesus as the Son of God (Jn. 3:16); (3) repent of his or her sins (Acts 2:38; 17:30); (4) confess Christ as the Son of God (Acts 8:37); and (5) be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. In order to baptize a person, we need “much water” (Jn. 3:23), since baptism is the likeness of the burial of Christ (Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12). Baptism is necessary in order to get “into Christ” (Gal. 3:27) where all spiritual blessings are found (Eph. 1:3). If you have been baptized according to New Testament teaching, then you are in Christ. And if you are in Christ, then you are in the church, because the church is the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23; Col. 1:18). You are not accepted into the church through votes of the majority of the congregation, but through obedience to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. God then adds you to the church (Acts 2:47). You and I can identify the true church of which the New Testament speaks.

If the church to which you belong does not have Jesus as its Founder, then you are not part of the true New Testament church. If the church to which you belong did not have its beginning in the year A.D. 30 in Jerusalem, then you are not part of the New Testament church. If the church to which you belong does not worship according to New Testament teaching, then you are not part of the New Testament church. If the church to which you belong does not have the same organization as the church of which we read in the New Testament, then you are not part of the New Testament church. If the church to which you belong does not teach the same plan of salvation as the New Testament teaches, but teaches instead that a person is saved through a prayer asking Jesus to become your personal savior, then you are not part of the one true church. If the name of the church to which you belong does not have a biblical name like the one about which we read in the Bible (Rom. 16:16), then you are not part of the one true church.

I encourage you to study the Word of God. Do not be deceived by the doctrines of men. You **can** learn which church is the one true church (Jn. 8:32; 17:7). You **can** know that what I have said here is the Word of God. If you are not yet part of the New Testament church, I hope you will consider seriously what we have studied in this lesson—and then do what is necessary to become a Christian.