

Identifying The New Testament Church

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Jesus Christ our Lord made the promise that He would build His church (Matt. 16:18). In Acts chapter two we read of people being added to the church by the Lord as they were being saved (Acts 2:47). Later, there was persecution against the church (Acts 8:1-3). So we know that Jesus fulfilled His promise.

The church of the New Testament was neither Jewish, Catholic, nor Protestant, but was for all people. Isaiah, the prophet, foretold that "all nations shall flow unto it" (Isa. 2:2). Jesus sent the apostles out to "teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 28:19). And the apostle Paul says, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free.." (I Cor. 12:13). "So, we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (Rom. 12:5). And the scriptures tell us the body is the church (Col. 1: 18; Eph. 1:22, 23).

THERE WAS A DEPARTURE

The apostle Paul understood human nature, but more than that, he was inspired by the Holy Spirit. He warned the elders of the church of Ephesus, "Of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:30). And again he said, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron" (I Tim. 4:1,2). And Peter warned, "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of" (2 Pet. 2:1, 2).

The history of the church verifies the truth revealed by these men of God. As a result of these facts, hundreds of "churches" have, come into existence through the centuries since the New Testament church was established by Jesus Christ our Lord. They teach conflicting doctrines and offer salvation by every means imaginable, which cannot be right, because "God is not the author of confusion" (I Cor. 14:33). "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it" (Psa. 127:1).

WAYS TO IDENTIFY THE CHURCH

The word of God gives enough information concerning the New Testament church for a person to be able to recognize it, if he will be honest with himself and look for the evidence in the scriptures. Remember Jesus said, "Seek and ye shall find" (Matt. 7:7). One should look for the passages in the Word of God which tell us where the church began and when it was established. He should look for other things which help to identify it, such as the founder, the price paid for it, the name, the laws that

govern it, and the steps of admission into it.

PLACE OF BEGINNING

Over seven hundred years before Christ came, the prophet Isaiah foretold that the church would begin in Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-4). Jesus corroborates this. He said, "Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Lk. 24:46,47)." Luke further records, "And being assembled with them (the apostles), commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which saith he, ye have heard of me... But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you. and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:4,8).

TIME OF BEGINNING

The apostles, in obedience to Christ, were assembled together in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, waiting for the promise of the Father. The scriptures tell us, "And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:1-4). This was 33 A.D. That day there were about three thousand precious souls converted through the preaching of the apostles (Acts 2:41). The apostle Peter later referred to that day of Pentecost and what took place there in Jerusalem as the "beginning" (Acts 11:15).

FOUNDER OF THE CHURCH

When Christ was on earth, He said, "I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18). John the Baptist had been dead for several months when the Lord made this promise. The New Testament church was not built by John, but by Christ. Since the church of Christ was established on the day of Pentecost, 33 A.D., there have been many counterfeits which have come into existence. But remember, "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it" (Psa. 127:1). Christ promised to build only one -- His church.

PRICE PAID FOR THE CHURCH

The church of the New Testament was purchased at great cost. The Bible tells us Christ "loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Eph. 5:25). Again, we are told that He "purchased (it) with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). No other church in the world had such a price paid for it -- the New Testament church alone.

MEMBERS WEAR A SCRIPTURAL NAME

The church belongs to Christ -- the church of Christ. And those who are members of the church are privileged to wear His name. "The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch" (Acts 11:26). "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

CHRIST IS HEAD

The scriptures tell us that God "gave him to be head over all things to the church" (Eph. 1:22). Again, "Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body" (Eph. 5:23). No human being on earth is the head of the Lord's church, and never has been. This exalted position is reserved for Christ alone. It was given to Him by God. To claim otherwise is blasphemy.

THE BIBLE, THE ONLY CREED BOOK

The word creed comes from the Latin "credo", which means "I believe". No man other than those inspired of God have ever been given authority to write a creed book for the church. The scriptures are inspired (2 Tim. 3:16) and the Bible is our only guide from earth to heaven. God has given all that "pertains to life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3).

STEPS OF ADMISSION

A person becomes a member of the church, not by "joining the church", but by "obeying the gospel". The Lord adds to the church such as should be saved (Acts 2:47). God requires that the alien sinner hear the Word (Rom. 10:14). Next, he must believe it (Mk. 16:16). Then he must repent of his sins (Acts 17:30). He must also confess his faith in Christ (Rom. 10:9). Finally, he must be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). When He does this, he is added to the church of the Lord.