



LESSON THREE

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THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

— LESSON 3 —

THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

Finding a church to attend is a daunting task. Those desiring to worship God are faced with an almost unlimited number of options. Choices range from old-fashioned, traditional churches to modern, new-age mega-churches. With so many to choose from, people often give little thought as to why they attend a particular place of worship. Reasons for selecting a church might come down to its demographics, its location, its social activities, or whether it simply feels like a good fit. While these reasons may seem valid, are they biblically sound?

According to the Scriptures, selecting a church should require deeper, more serious thought. This study will emphasize the importance that God has placed on the church, especially in view of the fact that Jesus bought the church with His own precious blood. As Paul teaches in Ephesians 3:10-11, the church has an eternal purpose in God's scheme of redemption.

In this lesson, we will search the Scriptures to learn:

What is the church?

What is the relationship
between Christ and
the church?

What is the relationship
between the church
and salvation?

What is the importance
of a church's name?

What is religious unity?

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

In Matthew 16:18, Jesus makes a promise after Peter confesses Him as “the Christ, the Son of the living God”: “**And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.**” Many misunderstand the nature of the church and conclude that Jesus failed to establish His kingdom, so He established the church instead. Such teaching fails to appreciate the truth about God’s kingdom and His eternal plans. Jesus, in establishing the church, was fulfilling ancient prophecies concerning the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth. The church fulfills the divine plan and is not an “afterthought” of God.

The word “church” in our English Bibles is the translation of the Greek word **ekklesia**, and is defined as “a calling out” (Strong’s Greek Dictionary). Therefore, it is improper to view the church as a building, a social club, or a denomination; it is much more.

- The church is a *group of people* who are called out of a world of sin by the gospel and who determine to live a righteous life in the eyes of God.
- The head of the church is Christ. The Apostle Paul declares “... **Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body**” (Ephesians 5:23). In Colossians 1:18, he states, “**And He is the head of the body, the church.**” Scripture is emphatic—Jesus is the head of the church, has authority over it (Matthew 28:18).
- The church is the “**house of God**” (1 Timothy 3:15).

These passages all stress the importance of the church – let no one say the church is unimportant!

To understand the nature of the church, it is necessary to grasp the concept of the kingdom. In Matthew 16:18-19, Jesus taught:

And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

The phrase “**kingdom of Heaven**” is often used interchangeably with the word “**church.**” When the New Testament writers speak of the kingdom, they are primarily speaking of the church.

Who promised to build the church?_____

The word “church” means _____

For the husband is head of the wife, as also _____ is _____
of the church; and He is the Savior of the body (Ephesians 5:23).

The phrase “kingdom of Heaven” is used _____ with the
word “church.”



CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

Since Jesus promised to build the church (Matthew 16:18), it comes as no surprise that He has a special relationship with the church. The church is dear to Jesus as He paid an enormous price for it. In Paul's plea with the Ephesian elders to take special care to oversee the church, he states, "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28).

Jesus so loved the church that He was willing to shed His blood for her. What an amazing love! To overlook the value of the church or to consider her irrelevant in modern times is to miss the blood-stained connection. Looking at the church in another light, consider what Paul writes to the Ephesians, describing the bond between Christ and the church: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her" (Ephesians 5:25). Oh, how deep the love of Christ for His church! Jesus paid the ultimate price as He gave Himself for her.

Using the analogy of Christ and the church to explain the marriage relationship, Paul teaches in Ephesians 5:23-25:

For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.

Carefully notice the precious truths of this passage:

- Christ is the head of the church.
- Christ is the savior of the body.
- The church is subject unto Christ.
- Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her.

Beyond all doubt, the importance and relevance of the church is proved. Christ is the head (authoritative figure) of the church. The church is a spiritual body that belongs to Him. Thus, He is in charge and we comply with His desires. Christ is also the savior of the body, the church, making membership in the New Testament church a necessity. The church is subject to Christ, for He purchased her with His shed blood; and she belongs to Him. His willingness to give Himself for the church ought to remove any inclination man has to tamper with the divine pattern concerning His bride, the church.

The church was purchased by the _____ of Christ.

For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the _____;

and He is the Savior of the _____. 24 Therefore, just as the

_____ is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in

everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also _____

the church and _____ Himself for her (Ephesians 5:23-25).

Christ is the _____ of the church (Ephesians 5:23).

Is the church relevant today? _____



THE CHURCH AND SALVATION

In modern times, one of the most disregarded aspects of the church is her connection with salvation. Many believe one can be saved and then join the church of his choice. Others believe they can be saved without even being a member of the church. Such teaching is in error when one looks at the truth presented in the Bible. Let us consider that truth, so that we may know the vital connection between salvation and the church.

Jesus teaches that the coming of the kingdom, the church, would be attended with teaching about “repentance and remission of sins” (Luke 24:47). After Peter’s sermon in Acts 2, which is the first gospel sermon of the New Testament era, the audience asks in verse 37, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” The inspired response of Peter in verse 38 is, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Reading the text further reveals the forgiveness of sins, that is, being saved from past sins, is realized at the point of baptism. When they were baptized, the “Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). They were not added to the church before they were baptized, and it is the Lord who adds one to His church. In the Bible, one did not fill out a membership form, answer a series of questions, and then submit to a vote to see if he would be accepted into a church’s membership rolls. It is the Lord who adds, and those who are added are saved. Thus, the connection is clear – one cannot be saved without being a member of the church!

When we pull together the wealth of New Testament teaching on this subject, we see these truths illuminated.

- The church is the spiritual body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23).
- One “may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2 Timothy 2:10).
- Being in Christ is equivalent to being in the church.

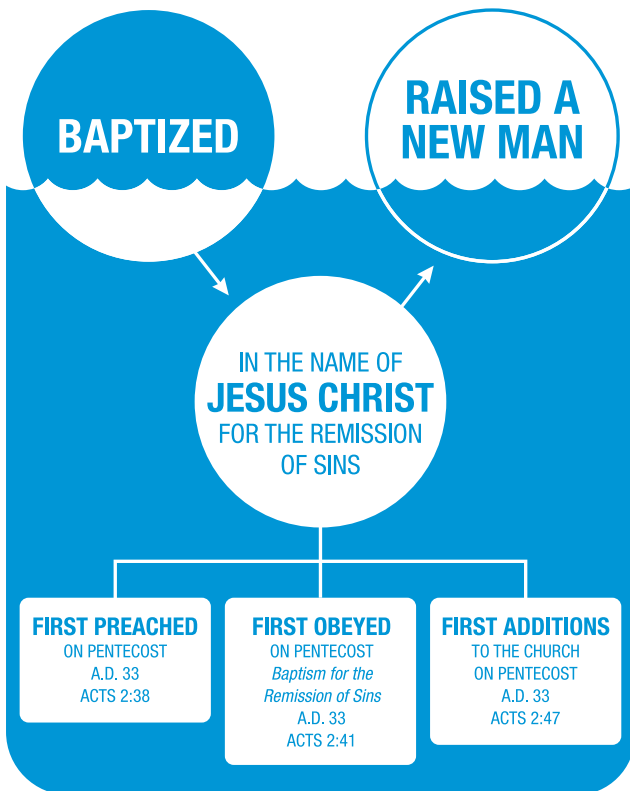
All we need now is to know how to get in Christ. Thankfully, Scripture provides the answer. In writing to the Galatians, Paul explains, “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (3:27). It is one’s willingness to be baptized that puts him into Christ, His Body, the Church, where salvation is found.

The key teaching on which the church is based is _____ and
_____ of _____ (Luke 24:47).

Praising God and having favor with all the people. And the _____ added
to the _____ daily those who were being _____
(Acts 2:47).

Who adds one to the church? _____ (Act 2:47)

_____ puts one into Christ (Galatians 3:27).



THE NAME OF THE CHURCH

As you observe the various names of religious institutions today, is it not odd that many of the names on buildings are foreign to the Bible? Why would we, as New Testament Christians, desire to worship God in a place wearing a name not found in the Bible? As we continue the quest to identify the New Testament church, we should carefully notice what the church is called. Notice the various names used in Scripture to describe the church:

- “My church” (Matthew 16:18)
- “The church” (Acts 8:1)
- “Church of God” (1 Corinthians 1:2)
- “Church of the living God” (1 Timothy 3:15)
- “Church of the firstborn” (Hebrews 12:23)
- “Churches of Christ” (Romans 16:16)

When analyzing the names given to describe the church, we quickly come to an inescapable conclusion – the names of the church show it is owned by Christ. The name church of Christ is not only scriptural, it also includes and embraces every term used to describe the church in the Bible. After all, Christ promised to build her, He died for her, He shed His blood for her, and He continues to be her head. Let us strive to put away party names and hold only to biblical descriptions. Members of the New Testament church are called:

- Christians (Acts 11:26)
- Saints (Philippians 4:1)
- Brethren (Colossians 1:2)
- Disciples (Acts 20:7)

RELIGIOUS UNITY

As has been the case for centuries, there is a great deal of confusion and division in Christianity these days. This chaos and strife does not reflect the teaching of the Bible and is not the Lord's will for His people. Jesus desires for His children to live in unity and harmony. In John 17:21-23, Jesus prayed:

That they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

Unity among His disciples is the desire of our Lord. It is not His desire to see many churches worshiping in differing ways and teaching conflicting doctrines. Jesus wants all His followers to be united on His teaching. This picture of unity is how the church of the New Testament is presented. Acts 4:32 reads, “**Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul.**” They were close and lived in harmony.

Religious division is not to be taken lightly or dismissed casually – God expects better from His people. Notice the directive given to the Corinthians concerning the matter in 1 Corinthians 1:10: “**Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.**” Division was happening in the Corinthian congregation, and they were instructed to cease. What was going on at Corinth was not acceptable to the Lord nor the Apostle Paul:

For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe’s household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, “I am of Paul,” or “I am of Apollos,” or “I am of Cephas,” or “I am of Christ.” Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” (1 Corinthians 1:11-13).

Clearly, there is to be no division. One is not allowed to follow after any man, even if that man is Paul or Peter. The modern religious phenomenon of denominationalism and division goes against the Lord’s wishes expressed in the New Testament. We should carefully strive to follow only after the pattern of the Bible.

What name should the church wear? _____

Does Jesus want His children to live in harmony? _____

“Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no _____ among you, but that you be perfectly joined _____ in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Corinthians 1:10).

CONCLUSION

Our search to find the church in the New Testament has led us to many wonderful discoveries. As we have studied together, we have noticed:

- The church is much more than just a building; it is a group of called-out people.
- The church is referred to as the body of Christ, the house of God, and the kingdom of heaven.
- Jesus, in establishing His church, shares a special relationship with her.
- Jesus' shed blood, the purchase price of the church, shows forth the importance of the church.
- Our salvation depends on our membership in the church – it is simply that important!
- The church was called specific names in the Bible, which, when analyzed, all show a connection to Christ. Thus, we call the church “the church of Christ” to be true to the biblical pattern.

These key doctrines are given so that we may be united religiously, thus fulfilling the plea of Jesus.

Name

Email

Address





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