

We have just completed a series of lessons on the last 24 hours of Jesus. In those lessons we saw the suffering Jesus endured on our behalf. Part of that suffering resulted in him shedding his blood. This shedding resulted into at least two things for us. One it provided a means of washing away our sins. ***Revelation 1:5 And from Jesus Christ, who ... loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.*** The second is that his blood purchased the church. In speaking to the elders at the church in Ephesus Paul would write ***Acts 20:28 ... to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.*** It's the church that he purchased that is the center of today's discussion.

Most view the church of Christ as another denomination among the hundreds in America today. But that is not what I mean when I say the church of Christ. I am not speaking of a denomination whose building is between two prominent denominations. I will be talking about the church that you read about in your New Testament; the church that was built and purchased by Christ – Christ's church.

The New Testament teaches us what the church was then, and what it should be today. Regarding the church, it's important that we are educated by the New Testament and not by the ideas of men.

Jesus said that He "*will build*" (in the future) His church. ***Matthew 16:18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.***

Recall that in Acts 20:28 the apostle Paul talking with the elders from Ephesus and mentions the church that "*was purchased with His blood;*" note that it was in existence. Somewhere between these two time-frames, the church of Christ came into existence. From a little study, we learn that the beginning of the church took place on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. The last verse of that chapter says that people were being added to the church on a daily basis. ***Acts 2:47- Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.*** To what church were these people being added? The obvious answer was to the church that Jesus promised to build; the church that existed in Ephesus.

What if you could flash back to the city of Jerusalem and you look up some of those

people for an interview and you ask them, “Which denomination did you just join? Of what denomination did you become a member?” Those people looked stunned as they had no clue what they were just asked. So, you began rattling off some names of churches that we are familiar with, and they were still in a fog as to what you were talking about. They said all they know is that there was a man of divine origin who lived in the flesh and bled and died on a Calvary tree. He was resurrected and returned to heaven. They said they believed that He is the son of God and that they repented of the wrong in their lives and were baptized for the remission of their sins, and He added them to His church. They said that is the only church they knew anything about. You see, denominational churches did not come into existence until hundreds of years later. In the first century all that you had was the church of Christ.

Frequently the church is referred to the “body” of Christ. ***Colossians 1:18 – “And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.***

Now read: ***Romans 12:4-5 For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: (5) So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.***

Ephesians 4:4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling. The Lord only promised to build ONE church, and one church is all that he built. No one else has the right to start a church as a divinely-approved institution. This was one of the problems the church in Corinth had which caused Paul to write that there should be no divisions among them. ***1 Corinthians 1:10-13 Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*** After religious division arose within the church at Corinth, Paul asked some probing questions. “*Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?*” (1 Cor. 1:13). The church belongs to Christ on the basis that He died for it and He built it. The church belongs to Christ and He is the head of the church and as such is the only one qualified to establish the church.

Secondly, the church that belongs to Christ began in Jerusalem as recorded in Acts 2. This is important because its origin was foretold in the OT by both Isaiah and Micah. *Isaiah 2:2-3 And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.* The events on day of Pentecost in Acts 2 are said to be the last days (v17). *(3) And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths:* Paul calls the church the house of God in 1 Timothy 3:15. *for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.* Religious bodies that have their origin in Rome, Zurich, London, or any other place are ones that started in the wrong places. The church began in Jerusalem.

When the gospel was preached by Paul and others throughout the ancient world, different denominations were not set up. Whenever the pure gospel of Christ was taught, just as it was preached for the first time in Jerusalem, the result when people obeyed the gospel was simply Christians who belonged to Christ — collectively they are the church that belongs to Christ. So, we read about churches in different locations like the church in Ephesus, Galatia, Corinth, etc. In Revelation chapters 2 and 3, we read about seven churches in Asia. These are not different man-made institutions, but rather different congregations of the Lord's church that had been established in these various locations.

Third, let me now address the term "*church of Christ*." As [previously stated, "*The church of Christ*" is not a denominational title that describes a religious institution established by men. Rather, it is a descriptive term describing the church that belongs to Christ. The people who complied to the Lord's teaching and have been added to that church and are simply called "Christians."

Most of the time in the New Testament, the church is simply called "*the church*." Other times it is called "*the body*" and occasional it is designated as the churches of Christ (Rom. 16:16) and church of God (1 Cor. 1:2). All these expressions are scriptural

terms that describe the church as belonging to Christ and God. A point I want you to get is that the *church of Christ* is not a name. It is a descriptive term describing the divine institution build by Christ.

The church is the spiritual kingdom of Christ. During the earthly ministry of Jesus, both he and John the Baptist preached that the kingdom of heaven was near – not here year but near. On one occasion Jesus *said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power. Mark 9:1* Common sense tells us that the residents in the kingdom of God (heaven) would be the saved. Notice that this is how Paul describes them in the book of Colosse. *Colossians 1:12-14 Giving thanks unto the Father, ... (3) Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: (14) In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:* As we dissect this passage, we notice several things. **ONE** is that we are not in the power of darkness (i.e. sin) but are in the kingdom. The kingdom is now in existence. **SECONDLY**, those who are in the kingdom had received redemption and forgiveness of sin. This means that they are saved. Recall the saved were added to the church. John in writing to the churches of Asia would say in *(Revelation 1:9) I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.*

Is all this important some might ask. Short answer is “yes.” Let look at a few scriptures as to why it is important and then draw some conclusions. First, recall that the church and the body of one and the same. *Romans 12:4 For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office:* Paul would simply write in Ephesians that there is one body (Eph 4:4). Jesus promised to build but one church and one is all that you read about in your New Testament.

Now notice the end of Eph 5:23. *Ephesians 5:23 For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.* Jesus is the savior of the body, i.e. the church. Salvation is in the body; i.e. in Christ.

2 Timothy 2:10 Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also

obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. The apostle John says the same thing. ***1 John 5:11 And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.*** To summarize: Christ is the savior of the body, Salvation is in Christ, and Eternal life is in the Son (i.e. Christ).

Again, the biblical definition of the church found in Acts 2:47 is the saved. If you are saved you are added to the church; if you are in the church you are saved. Jesus is the savior of the church. When Jesus returns, he is going to deliver the kingdom to God the Father. Recall the kingdom is the church. ***1 Corinthians 15:24 Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power.***

The conclusion that I draw is that when Jesus comes again he is coming for the church, not the world. He came to the world and offered a plan of salvation (John 3:16) but when he comes again he is coming for his spiritual kingdom. This makes being in Christ a serious matter. How does one get into Christ? Three passages give us this answer. ***Galatians 3:27 For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.***

Romans 6:3 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?

1 Cor. 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.

We call this obeying the gospel. 1Cor.15:1-4 likens the gospel which was preached to the death/burial/resurrection of Jesus. Romans 6:3-4 describes this as baptism. Obeying the gospel is important. ***2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, (8) In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: (9) Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;***

█ Invitation. Do you need to obey the gospel and be added to the Lord's church?