

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST - THE ONE BODY (Eph. 4:4)

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The church of the Bible is not the old Jewish institution perpetuated. Christ made this plain to Nicodemus, a Jew, having been born by a fleshly birth into the Jewish covenant, when He taught him that he would have to be born again before he could enter the kingdom of God. **John 3:1-7**. The church of the Bible is not a worldly, political institution; nor is it any part of a human denomination. Christ made these things plain when He said, "My kingdom is not of this world" **John 18:36**. The church is truly the kingdom of heaven - A Spiritual kingdom.

In **Ephesians 1:22-23**. Paul said, "And has put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the Head over all things **to the church, which is His Body**, the fullness of Him that fills all in all." After this reading, one does not have to guess or surmise as to what the church is. It plainly says **the church is the body of Christ**. Paul said to the Corinthians-"**Now you are the body of Christ, and members in particular**" **1 Cor. 12:27**. **There is one body**. So there is **only one church**. **Eph. 4:4**

The church of Christ, then, being not the old Jewish institution, nor any worldly, political organization, nor any part of a human denomination, must have a beginning place. We may correctly and scripturally say that from the depths of the eternal past the church has been in existence, but we may just as correctly and scripturally say that, prior to the ushering in of the new covenant which took place on Pentecost, and after the death of Jesus Christ, the church did not exist as a fully established institution, and able to save.

The church first **existed in purpose** in the mind of Almighty God. "...but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. **He was chosen before the creation of the world**, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. **1 Peter 1:19-20**.

The church then **existed in promise**, having been promised by God to Abraham in **Gen. 12:1-3**. Finally, **the church existed in prophecy**. Many people will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob so that we may walk in His paths. **The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. Isaiah 2:3**.

With time almost fulfilled, and the last of the Old Testament prophets having spoken, God sent another and last prophet before the coming of His Son, and this man was John the Baptist. John's mission was a preparatory one--he came to make ready a people for the Lord. He came from God to bear witness of the Light. **Jn.1:1**. And so during the days of John the Baptist, and all through the personal ministry of our Lord, we find things in **preparation** for the coming kingdom, or church, and thus we speak of this period of time as the **preparatory** state of the church—or **the church in preparation**" John chapter 1.

And then last, but not least, upon the consummation of God's great plan of the ages, sending His Son in the flesh to die at Calvary, and with all things now ready, in the year **A. D. 30**, on that first Pentecost, fifty days after our Lord had burst asunder the bars of the tomb, and had ascended back to the Father, thus becoming High Priest and King, the church **came in perfection**. Starting with **Acts, the second chapter**, we have the church sent from heaven above, Spirit-filled, and blood-bought, able to save, and people being added to it by being born again, or having a part in the new birth. **Acts 2:47**

Time and Beginning of the Lord's church.

Here on that great feast day of the Jewish Pentecost, the Jews heard the gospel preached, for the first time, by the apostle Peter. The apostles had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. They were equipped to begin carrying out the Great Commission of **Matthew 28:19-20**. Jesus had suffered, bled and died and had risen from the dead and had ascended back to the Father, thus making Him "Head over all things to the church." **Eph.1:19-23**. Had there been a church completely established, as some claim before Pentecost, we would have to say it was not "in perfection", without a Head, and without a Spirit. A church in such condition **could not be known as a church "in perfection", and in such condition could not save.**

Not until Jesus was glorified was the Spirit given **John 7:39**. But when was He glorified? In **Luke 24:26** we get the answer, "**Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?**" So we have to consider His sufferings at Calvary, and His ascension, which brings us to **Acts, the second chapter**. There is just no other way to meet these scriptural conclusions. Jesus had passed through the suffering and agonies of the cross; He had conquered death and the grave; He ascended according to the working of the mighty power of God, and set down at the right hand of God in the heavenly places becoming the Head of the church. **So we certainly have the right time for the beginning of the Lord's church in the condition of perfection**, and in an operative way for the saving of lost souls.

But what about the place?

Where was the church to be established? In just any place? No! God speaking through His prophet, Zechariah, said, "**I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies; my house shall be built in it**" **Zech.1:16**. Again, we find in **Luke 21:46-47** the following, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day; and **that repentance and remission of sins** should be preached in His name among all the nations, **beginning from Jerusalem.**" Luke calls Jerusalem the beginning place. What could be plainer? Not only can we be sure by the foregoing scriptures **that Jerusalem was the beginning place and Pentecost the time for the beginning of the Lord's church**, but we can also establish **the year, the day, and the very hour of the day when it began.**

Let us read **Acts 2:15** "For these are not drunken as you suppose, seeing it is but the **third hour** of the day." The Jews determined the day to begin at six o'clock in the morning, and Peter's statement, "seeing it is but the third hour of the day", **sets the time at nine (9) o'clock in the morning on the day of Pentecost, in the year A. D. 30**. Any church, or denomination, which claims it had its beginning at any date earlier or later than the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ, **is not the church of the Bible**. How great and how sure is the eternal plan of God!

Who Built the Church?

Having established the time **A. D. 30**, on the day of Pentecost, and the beginning place, Jerusalem, we may then ask--**Who built the church?** This question is in order. Did any group of men, or any one man, without divine guidance and help, establish or found the church? We shall see. Here we need only two choice "stones or rocks" for our new building (A Rock and a Capstone). In **Matthew 16:18**, Christ Himself, speaking to Peter, "And I say also unto you, that you are Peter, **and upon this Rock I will build My church**; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The testimony given by

Peter in **Matt. 16:16**,-"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"--**was the Rock upon** which Christ was to build His church. Here Christ plainly states He was the One who would build **His church**. In **Acts 2**, Peter again, states this glorious truth, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God has made that same Jesus, whom you crucified both Lord and Christ." Therefore, to say that **the church of Christ is heaven-born, spirit filled, and blood-bought**, is certainly to speak by **the authority of Christ and his apostles**. What could be more plain, safe and sure?

Foundation of the Church

Any temporal building, in order to stand the storm which will come against it, must be supported by a good and substantial foundation. Just so, it is true, with the Lord's church. God's plans are always complete. With Him there are no failures, no mistakes. The church is built upon the most secure foundation--not that of earth, wood, rock, or cement--but let the apostle Paul tell us what kind of a foundation supports the church of our blessed Lord, "**And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone**;" "In whom all the building fitly framed together grows unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom you also are built together for an habitation of God through the Spirit". **Ephesians 2 :20-22**. So the church is supported by the foundation of the apostles and prophets, **Jesus Christ himself being the Chief corner stone**. No storm or gale of error can ever be so great or blow so hard as to break the church of God away from such a foundation. The foundation is safe, sure, and secure.

What Name Should Be Worn?

Is the name of the church important? Most men, and some preachers, will tell you the name is of no importance--that there is no salvation, not even in the church, much less in the name. Are they right? We believe, no. Any man in this world should not recognize any woman as his wife if she would refuse to wear his name. **The church is the Bride of Christ; Christ is the Bridegroom** At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. .."At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the Bridegroom! Come out to meet Him!' **Matt 25:6**.

Let us read--"Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the **name** of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him does this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at naught of you builders, which is become the Head of the corner. **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**. In **Rom. 16:16**, we read of the "churches of Christ", local congregations, such as at Rome, Ephesus, Colossae, Philippi, Corinth, Thessalonica, etc. In **Matthew 16:18** Christ declared He would build his church--then it belongs to no other. He bought it with His precious blood **Acts 20:28**. Why oppose such plain truth? **Will you not be satisfied to wear no other name than that of Christ?** "The disciples were first called '**Christians**' at Antioch." (in Syria.) **Acts 11:26**.

Identify of the Church

The whole appeal of the church of Christ is to "speak where the Bible speaks, and to be silent where the Bible is silent", and to always be able to have a, "What does the Bible say?" either in expressed terms, or by approved example, for that which we teach and practice. After the passing of more than nineteen hundred years since Pentecost, we ask, "Can such an organization, or church, as was shown to be started on Pentecost in **Acts 2**, be found now upon the earth? If so, how can we know

it when we read about it, or learn things concerning it? According to recent figures, there are thousands of churches in the world, with new ones, world-wide, being planned for this year.

The identity of the Lord's church is easy to find. The whole church meets on the first day of every week, singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs making melody in their hearts to the Lord. No instruments of music will be used. Prayers will be offered up, by men only. Also the teaching will be done, with brothers speaking in turns. The women will be silent in the teaching, or preaching session of the assembly. You will not find any dividing of the assembly into classes. At the end of the preaching service, an invitation song is usually sung, inviting those who may have a need to come forward and make their request known. Many come for baptism. Next, the Lord supper will be taken, and lastly, a contribution will be collected to support evangelist, widows or others who have special needs. Usually a dismissal prayer is in order. The church will not be supporting a located minister or preacher. These acts of worship may not be found in the above order. We are given some liberty in this. According to the Bible pattern, all of the above must be present with no additions or subtractions.

The merciful Lord willing, in my next publication, I am planning to mention several well-known organizations which claim to be the church of the Lord, giving their time and place of beginning, their founder, and the outstanding, peculiar doctrines taught by each and shall conclude with Scriptural points regarding what the Bible says. I assure you, that I will speak of no organization with any unkind feeling toward any man or woman deceived by them. **Our purpose is** to show the difference between the church of the Bible and the churches of men--**to show the difference between truth and error.** May all who have an honest heart, and may all desire only the truth, no matter what it may cost you, to receive and except it. Sometimes we may have to pay the consequences. **1 John 4:6.** "We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. **This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.**

Doctrine of First Principles

The terms of entrance into the Lord's church are plain. The honest heart will ask the question, "**What must I do to be saved?**" The Bible says:

1. **HEAR. Hear what?** The preaching of the gospel of Christ; the good news of salvation. The teachers of the law of Moses, asked Jesus, which of the commandments is the most important. Jesus replied, "**The most important one**" answered Jesus, is this: "**Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one God.**" **Mark 12:28-29.** Jesus instructed the multitude "**Consider carefully what you hear,**" **Mark 4:24.** The apostle Paul wrote to the Romans. "That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome. "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. **Rom 1:16.** Make sure you are hearing the true gospel. Paul warned the Galatian churches, "As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!" **Gal 1:9.** **Peter said,** "Make your salvation as sure as you can." **2 Pet. 1:10.**
2. **BELIEVE. Believe What?** A person can believe almost anything, even false doctrine. Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say, John the Baptist; others say Elijah, and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. " **But what about you?"** He asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "**You are the Christ, the Son of the living**

God." Matt 16:13-16. This we must **believe**. "I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not **believe** that I am **The One I claim to be**, you will indeed **die in your sins.**" **John 8:24.**

3. **REPENT. Repent of what? Our sins!** "That Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin." "For **all have sinned** and come short of the Glory of God." **Rom.3:23.** "**For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Rom 6:23.** Sin is the violation of God's law. We must understand that we all have broken God's law, time after time, and these sins must be forgiven.

But only the blood of Christ takes away sins. Jesus taught, "Those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them--do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! **But unless you repent, you too will all perish.**" **Luke 13:4-5.**" Peter admonished the multitude, "**Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out,** that times of refreshing may come from the Lord." **Acts 3:19.**

4. **CONFESS. What or who? One must confess from the heart they believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of the Living God.**" If this statement is not true, then everything else is useless. Let us look to **Romans 10:9-10,** "**That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.** For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved." God wants us to make **this confession from the heart and with the mouth.** Please don't be ashamed to tell others what is in your heart. Jesus said, "If anyone is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory and in the glory of the Father." **Luke9:26.**

5. **BAPTISM. Why baptism?** The Holy Spirit within us will always be there to help us **avoid temptation,** to be our **guide,** to give us **wisdom** and to **comfort** us in times of trouble, and much more, it is a gift from God! Another example: Philip went down to Samaria. "But when they believed Philip as he **preached the good news** of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, (Name means authority) **they were baptized, both men and women.**" **Acts 8:12-13.** A most interesting story follows:

As Philip continues his evangelist work **an angel** of the Lord said to him, "Go south on the road to Gaza." On his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch riding in his chariot and reading from the book of Isaiah the prophet, chapter 53. The **Spirit** told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it." "Do you understand what you are reading?" asked Philip. How can I, he said, unless someone explains it to me." So, he invited Philip to come up and sit with him." **Acts 8:35-40.** "Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him **the good news about Jesus.** As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then **both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water** and Philip baptized him. When they **came up out of the water,** the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing." No sprinkling or pouring for baptism here!

Some good and honest souls will say, "I was saved by the baptism of the Holy Spirit." Others say, "I was saved by an angel." Let us go back and take a second look at what the angel and Spirit did. The **angel** only gave Philip which direction to go and the **Spirit** told him to join the chariot. **That's all they did.** When

we preach Jesus we should get the same results as Philip. If we have preached Jesus, they should say, "Why can't I be baptized?" Evidently, yet thousands are misled by what is called, "The Sinner' Prayer." Here it is: "Jesus I know that I am a sinner. Please forgive me. I welcome you into my heart. Thank you." Almost all denominations will accept this for salvation. to become a member, they require baptism.

RE-BAPTISM. Is it necessary? An interesting account is given about re-baptism as recorded in Acts **19:1-6** While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?" "John's baptism," they replied. Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. When Jesus said, "baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit., It is certain they obeyed every instruction the Lord gave. When it is said, "They were baptized in the Name of Jesus; since Jesus had been given "all authority in heaven and earth" they baptized honoring His authority in the name of the Jesus, the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Almost all denominations teach you are saved before baptism, since it is an ordinance just as the Lord's supper is an ordinance. Jesus said, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." They reverse the command. Some vote on you, others baptize because of a church ordinance or creed, while others, sprinkle or pour water on you, especially infants. Babies are sprinkled with water, or poured on them to remove the sin of Adam. Since they teach sin is inherited, it has to be removed. Thousand are deceived by this false doctrine. The Bible is clear on this subject. Jesus was asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a little child and had him stand among them. And said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. **Matt 18:1-4.**

Children, though they believe in Jesus, are not subject to baptism until they become old enough to realize what sin, old enough to repent of their sins and confess Christ as Lord." When they reach the age of accountability, then baptism will wash away their sins, be buried by baptism into Christ and God will add them, as a new born baby, into His wonderful family, the church of Christ. Now, one must wear the name 'Christian'. Now, they are not Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, Protestant or Catholic, just plain Christians. If you have doubts, or reservations, why not make your salvation certain. I am studying with a young man right now who was baptized much younger because many of the other young kids were being baptized. Sometime it becomes a 'fad. He is seeing the need for re-baptism.

CONGRATULATIONS! The Lord has now added you, as one of His new-born, into His family of believers, **the church of our Lord Jesus Christ.** You have just experience the beginning of a new life, eternal life. May I offer some suggestions as to your next steps: **Study and read your Bible daily.** Start with one of the gospels, like Luke or John. **The Word builds faith.** "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God." **2 Tim 2:15.** From the time of our birth, like a new-born baby, we should be growing daily until we die.

Pray to God daily. Remember God is your father. He wants to stay in touch with you. No need to use big words. One time the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Lord, teach us to pray"! He replied, "When you pray say, "Our Father which art in Heaven, hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. (some translate the last sentence, " For your's is the kingdom, and the power and the glory forever, Amen. This is not the Lord's prayer, **it is the disciples' prayer.** At the time Jesus taught His disciples to pray the kingdom of heaven had not come, the church. The kingdom or church has come already, so we may pray: "Thank you Father for the church which your Son built." Something like that. This prayer sets forth a model or pattern to go by. He doesn't approve of repetitious prayers. Prayers are not selfish. Include others in your prayers.

Singing. Christians love to sing. Sing daily. Let us rejoice! We sing from the heart. We have so much to be thankful for, so much to praise God for. "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. **Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord,** always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." **Eph 5:19-20.** It is also a beautifully expressed in Paul's letter to the Colossians, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, **and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.** It is admitted, under the Law of Moses, instruments of music were commanded. But under the New Covenant the instrument was totally eliminated. No where did the Lord say, "Sing and play, making music in your heart." And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." **Col. 3:15-17.**

Fellowship and the Lord's Supper. This step is very important. Try your best to make every assembly called by the church. The Scriptures are very plain about this, "Let us not give up meeting together, **as some are in the habit of doing,** but let us encourage one another and all the more as you see the **Day** approaching."(**Judgment Day**). **Heb 10:25.** Always put God first in everything. Don't take a job that keeps you from attending services. God will provide. Lets follow the example of the first 3,000 converts." "They devoted themselves to the apostles' **teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread (partaking of the Lord's Supper) and to prayer.** Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts." **Acts. 2:42.**

"They broke bread (common meal) in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people." **This is true fellowship.** "And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." **Acts 2:42-47.** Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. **Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life,** and I will raise him up at the last day". **John 6:53. We observe the Lord's Supper together. It is called communion.** Notice: They met in their homes, at together, with glad and sincere hearts...Praising God! What sweet fellowship! We enjoy this same fellowship today.

Preaching/Teaching Service. Listen for truth or error. Paul told Timothy, “**Preach the Word**; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage-with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine, Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.” **2 Tim 4:3-7.** **We do not ‘join’ the church but the Lord ‘adds’ us to it by the new birth. Let’s be careful to do what Jesus commanded, baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.**

The Contribution. We are not under the old Law of tithing - that is giving 10% of everything to God. Under the new Law of Christ **we must give or contribute from our income as we prosper and purpose in our hearts.** “On the first day of **every week**, our (Sunday) each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.” **1 Cor. 16:1.** The apostle Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Syria and Asia urging the brethren to help those poor saints in Jerusalem. Let us read about a response to this need. “During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit **predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world.** (This happened during the reign of Claudius Ceasar) The disciples, each **according to his ability**, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Paul.” **Acts 11:27-30.**

Paul wrote in his **second letter to the Corinthians** in regards to the appeal that had been made to help the poor saints in Jerusalem, “And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for **the privilege of sharing** in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, **but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us** in keeping with God's will.” **2 Cor. 8:1-5** “ In the next chapter he continues his appeal, “Remember this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. **Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.** And God is able to make all grace abound to you, **so that in all things, at all times, having all that you need,** you will abound in every good work.” **2 Cor. 9:6-9.**

A final admonition, especially to the young converts, the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, a young evangelist, the following: **1 Tim 4:11-5,** “Command and teach these things. Don't let anyone look down on you **because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.** Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.... Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, **so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.**” We must do both, watch our life - that is how we live - and watch our doctrine, that which we believe and practice. Notice it said, “**Closely.**” Both are so important to be an effective Christian. Put your heart and soul into the work of the church. In other words, **BE A CHRISTAIN!**