

The Church, the Body of Christ

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This article is compiled from the teachings of Chester McCalley, late pastor of Beth Haven Church in North Kansas City, Missouri.

Introduction This study is outlined around seven Bible passages which deal specifically with the Church, the Body of Christ.

Many people think of church in terms of brick and mortar, program and form. But in these passages you will learn that the Church is a spiritual organism, dear to the heart of God the Father.

Jesus' Use of the Word "Church" Matthew 16:16-18

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.*

This is the first time Jesus utters the word "church", in fact it is the first occurrence in the Bible. Jesus used the word two other times in His ministry, both in Matthew 18:17.

There are three basic facts in these verses about the church.

The church's foundation - The phrase "this rock" in verse 18 refers Peter's confession in verse

16, where he acknowledges the deity of Jesus Christ, that He is the "Son of the Living God."

Since the church rests on the foundation of the deity of Jesus Christ, we cannot add anyone to that foundation.

Jesus said "I will build my church", therefore no one can claim the church as a unique possession.

The church's beginning - "Will build" is in the future tense. The church was future to Christ's earthly ministry. This immediately corrects three common errors:

1. That the church started with Adam
2. That the church started with Abraham
3. That the church is the same as Israel in the Old Testament

The church's durability - "the gates of hell shall not overpower it."

What is the Church? Ephesians 1:22, 23

And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church,

which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

The church is clearly defined as "His body"; the church is the Body of Christ. Nothing is more important to understand than this concept.

The Bible relates Jesus Christ to the church in three ways:

1. He is the **builder** of the church, Matthew 16:18.
2. He is the **substance** of the church, Ephesians 1:22,23.
3. He is the **authority** of the church, Colossians 1:18

Colossians 1:18

He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

How Do We Enter the Church? 1 Corinthians 12:13

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

We enter the church by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This occurs at the moment we trust Christ as our Savior. The Holy Spirit puts us into Jesus Christ. The fact that we are in Jesus Christ means that we are also in the church.

The church described as Christ's body is used in two ways in the Bible.

1. The church refers to believers in a universal sense, as here in 1 Cor. 12:13. Every believer, in every place, is in this universal body.
2. The word "church" is also used to refer to the believers in a local geographical sense. Thus, 1 Corinthians 1:2 speaks of the church "at Corinth."

When Was the Church Formed? Acts 1:4,5

Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," *He said*, "you heard of from Me;

for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

In Acts 1 we learn that Jesus had died, had risen from the dead, and was conducting forty days of post-resurrection ministry, teaching the disciples those "things which pertain to the kingdom of God".

The baptism of the Holy Spirit, which formed the church, was still several days in the future at this time, "not many days hence."

Acts 2:1-4

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.

And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.

And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them.

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

This passages relates a fulfillment of prophecy. The key expression is "was fully come". A specific time had arrived; God was fulfilling His prophetic timetable.

Pentecost came to fulfill prophecy, not to reward obedience.

Although the baptism of the Holy Spirit is not mentioned in Acts 2, in Peter's speech to the Christians at Antioch in Acts 11, where he related what had occurred with Cornelius' family (Acts 10), we have an account of what happened on the day of Pentecost..

Acts 11:15-17

And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as *He did* upon us at the beginning.

And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'

Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as *He gave* to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"

The Church as a Reality Acts 5:11

And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things.

Therefore, the church became an existing, present reality on the Day of Pentecost, and from that point forward, the church is a prominent part of Christian life.

Summary The church was future to Jesus Christ's ministry both before His death on the cross

and after He rose from the dead.

The church is Christ's body. Every believer in Christ was placed into Christ's body, thus into the church, by the mechanism of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit occurred for the first time on the Day of Pentecost, from which time the church became a living reality.

Conclusions The church is *never* referred to in the Bible as a building. The first building actually known to have been used for congregational gatherings was no earlier than the 2nd or 3rd century.

The church is *never* a denomination

The local church is the center of God's operation today.