

# What Church Do You Belong To?

Acts 2:47

We live in a world where there are literally thousands of different religious organizations or churches. Interestingly, when you began to look at all the varying religious entities in our world today, isn't that amazing that they wear different names and practice different doctrines? And yet, in John chapter 17, when the Lord Jesus is praying to the father and the shadow of the cross, you remember the Lord prayed that we might all be one.

Well, the means by which we can be one, religiously speaking, is the Word of God. In other words, we've got to all stand on the last will and testament of Christ, which is the Bible, the New covenant. Now that being said, I want to ask you a question. What church do you belong to? You know, again, we talk about the various religious entities that exist today.

Did you know that when the Lord established the church on Pentecost day, as recorded by Luke and Acts chapter two? Have you ever thought there was not one single denomination in existence at that time? Now, that might surprise a lot of people, because when you look historically speaking, denominationalism, as we know it didn't come about for hundreds of years later, which ought to say something to us.

So again, I go back and I want to ask this question. I want you to think about it for a moment. What church do you belong to? I want to belong to the church that I can read about in Scripture. I really believe it is a tremendous privilege to be a member of the church that I read about in the Bible.

Now, please don't misunderstand me. I don't want you to think that I'm trying to come across in an arrogant manner at all, because I'm not. What I'm trying to do is to prompt you to think. Think about what the Bible has to say. You know, we've always said, or at least those of us who are members of churches of Christ.

We've always said that we want people to be like the Bereans of old. You remember in Acts chapter 17, verse 11, the Bible says that they searched the scriptures daily to see whether those things were so. In other words, the Word of God. Is that divine litmus test through which everything must pass. We ought to ask the question.

Many years ago, Paul asked a question in Romans chapter four, verse three. What does the Scripture say? Because when it's all said and done, really the only thing that matters in terms of faith and practice was the Bible say. Well, why would I say that? Because this is the book that's going to judge us one day. Now, there are a lot of manmade doctrines and denominational handbooks.

There have been a lot of people that have said a lot of things, religiously speaking, but we're not going to be judged on the doctrines and commandments of men. We're not going to be judged on any type of denominational dogma, but rather we are going to be judged by this book that we call the Bible. You remember Jesus said in John chapter 12 and verse 48, he that rejected me and receiveth not my word has that which judges him.

The words that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. Paul taught in Romans chapter two, in verse two that the judgment of God is according to truth. In verse 16, Paul said, in the day when the Lord will judge the hearts and lives of men by his gospel. Well, that's important because we have to understand that this is the book that's going to be opened on that great and final day.

So what we want to do is appeal to the Bible. Paul said to the church at Thessalonica. Prove all things, test all things. Hold fast that which is good, which would imply some things are good. So what I want to do is make sure that I'm basing what I believe and practice on this book that we call the Bible.

Now, that being said, listen to what Peter said. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God. Circling back to our question, what church are you a member of? Could I maybe encourage you to think about something for a moment, or two? Suppose you were to go to the grocery store this week, and while in the store shopping, you were to come out with a buggy full of groceries as you made your way into the parking lot.

You went to where you had parked your car, but to your surprise, your car is gone. No trace of it. And you began to think, well, maybe I parked in another place. So you began to look around the parking lot and it becomes apparent to you. Somebody stole my car. Well, the first thing you would do is call the police.

And when the police arrived, what would they do? Well, they would begin to assimilate some information from you. They would want to know the make and model of your car, the year of your car. Sure. Car two door. Four door is your. Is it a cars and a truck? Any special features? What color is it? Etc. all of these things will aid in them locating your car that had been stolen.

And so by that, what we would say is there are some identifying marks that would help to that would help them locate your stolen automobile. Or by the same token, what we have in Scripture are some identifying marks of the church of the New Testament. Now, I said a moment ago, it's a privilege to be a member of the church that I read about in the Bible, and I'm convinced that if I do what they did in the first century, that I can be what they were.

Well, what was that New Testament Christians? You remember in acts chapter 11, verse 26, the Bible says they were called Christians first in Antioch. The word Christian, really? If you were to look at the suffix of Christian, I am. That suffix means belonging to. So when I say I am a Christian, what I'm saying is I belong to Christ.

Well, in Romans 16 I read where the Bible says, the churches of Christ salute you. Now, I'm not using the expression of the phrase churches of Christ in a denominational manner, as some might think. What I'm saying is that the church belongs to Christ, showing possession. The churches of Christ. The churches belong to whom? To Christ. Now you only established one church.

But in Romans 16 I think about churches, plural, like churches and a geographical area, like the seven churches of Asia and revelation chapters two and three, or the churches of Galatia and Galatians chapter one. Now, that being the case, when I ask the question, what church do you belong to? Can you find your church in this book? There are some questions that we might ask.

Just like an officer would ask you, if your car were stolen, there were there'd be certain questions that he or she would ask. Well, by the same token, there's some questions that we might ask so that we might ascertain whether or not we're in the church of the Bible. So, number one, where did your church begin? In other words, what's the originating point of your church?

Now in Isaiah chapter two, the Bible tells us that the church began in the city of Jerusalem. That's where it was to originate. The word of the Lord would go forth from

Jerusalem. And Isaiah chapter two, verses two and three. Isaiah saw the church as an exalted mountain, and to which all nations would flow. Simply emphasizing the fact that the church would be comprised of Jews and Gentiles.

You remember in Romans, or rather in Ephesians chapter two, verse 16, Paul said that Jesus reconciled both Jew and Gentiles in one body, under God through the cross. So it's in the body that Jews and Gentiles enjoy redemption and reconciliation. Well, that was God's plan. So the church was to have its beginning. Where in Jerusalem, in the important for us to see in Luke chapter 24, before sending to heaven that Jesus instructed the apostles to tarry in Jerusalem, until, as he said, you're endued with power from on high.

He had already told them before his, before his journey to the cross, that after he departed, that they would be given the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit would then guide them into all truth. John 16:13. He would teach them all things, bring all things to their remembrance that he had said to them. John 14, verse 26. Now bear in mind the Lord was speaking exclusively there to the apostles.

They became his divine ambassadors. They were the ones in whom divine treasure, that is, the Word of God was housed. They were inspired in preaching and teaching and inspired message. So in Acts chapter two, we have the apostles where in Jerusalem and while in Jerusalem the Bible says they received that baptismal measure of the Holy Spirit, and they began to speak in other tongues as the spirit gave them utterance.

So we have the right place. Well, what about the time when we talk about the right place? That's an important question. Where did your church begin? But then secondly, when did your church begin? Well, any church that cannot trace its origin back to Jerusalem, we could assume we can say safely. That's not the New Testament church. Well, the church began when in the first century, in the days of the Roman kings.

You recall back in Daniel chapter two, Daniel saw Daniel had the opportunity to interpret a dream that King Nebuchadnezzar had in the long ago. Nebuchadnezzar was the king over the Babylonian Empire. Didn't understand the contents of that dream. Daniel, Daniel was summoned and thus gave the interpretation, and Daniel identified the contents of that dream, beginning with Nebuchadnezzar, the head of Babylonian.

And then they talked about how the Babylonians would give way to the Medes and the Persians, and then the Magi and the Persians would fall to the Grecian empire that would later yield to the Roman Empire. So then in verse 41, Daniel's been talking about that stone made without hands, cut without hands that would fill all the earth.

Now, back in Isaiah chapter two again, remember Isaiah talked about that the church was an exalted mountain in which all nations would flow. So this new kingdom is going to be one of divine origin. It's going to be unlike earthly kingdoms that rise and fall in successive order. Now, we said in the days of these kings that in some of the days of the Roman kings, the God of heaven is going to set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed.

It shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all those kingdoms. And here's what Daniel said. It shall stand. It will stand forever. So now we're talking about an eternal kingdom. So we have the right place. Jerusalem. The right time. The days of the Roman kings. Now let's just look at Matthew chapter three for a minute.

When John the Baptist began his earthly ministry, you remember he said, repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. John was pointing people in the direction of the Christ, and John was telling people about a coming kingdom. Now, isn't it fascinating to realize that in

Matthew 417, when Jesus began his earthly ministry, that he echoed the very same message over in Mark chapter nine at verse one?

You remember Jesus said, verily I say unto you, there are some of you standing here that shall not taste death until you see the kingdom of God come with power. Now there are people today, and they're mad. They believe that the kingdom is yet to be established. They're looking for the Lord to come back and to see it, and to rule and reign in Jerusalem.

Well, you need to understand something. The kingdom is already here. In Colossians one verse 12, Paul said, giving thanks to the father who's made us meet to be partakers of the of the saints of the inheritance in the light, who has delivered us out of the power of darkness, translated us into the kingdom of God's dear son. So what Paul is saying is, when we obey the gospel, that we are delivered out of the power of darkness, that's the world translated into the kingdom of God.

Well, what's the kingdom of God? It's the church in Matthew 16. In verse 18, Jesus promised to build the church. In verse 19 he told the apostles, I'll give you the keys of the kingdom. Well, kingdom and church in that context are one and the same, same institution, the kingdom and the church. Well, when did they begin? When did the kingdom?

Our church began on Pentecost day. Where? In the city of Jerusalem. At what time? Days of the Roman kings. So then, here's our conclusion. Any church that began outside the city of Jerusalem, not the New Testament church, any church that can't trace its origin back to the first century is not the New Testament church. Well, here's a third question.

Who built the church or who founded the church that you belong to? Now, I'm not talking about the church of Luther or Wesley or of any other individual. I'm talking about the church that was built and bought by Jesus. Now somebody might say, now wait a minute. You remember the Church of Christ and is the Church of Christ not the product of Thomas and Alexander Campbell going back to the 1800s?

Well, my response to that would be no. You see, Thomas and Alexander Campbell, they were just men, fallible men. But they realized that the world was engulfed in spiritual darkness. And what they sought to do was to strip away the doctrines and commandments of men and go back to the Bible, and to simply call Bible things by Bible names and do Bible things and Bible ways.

Nothing wrong with that. As Peter said, if any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God. Well, in Matthew chapter 16, the passage I mentioned a moment ago, you remember Jesus had to ask about his identity. And they said, some say you're John the Baptist, some Elijah, others Jeremiah, one of the prophets. And then the Lord asked this question, but whom do you say that I am?

Well, Peter said, You're the Christ, the son of the living God. And Jesus said, blessed are you, Simon, by Jonah. Flesh and blood is not revealed to you, but my father which is in heaven. And I also say to you that you're Peter. And upon this rock I will build my church. Now, bear in mind here Jesus is not telling Peter, I'm going to build the church on you, as some allege.

Now, I understand that the name Peter in the original is masculine and it denotes a small stone. The term rock, though, is feminine in gender and it denotes a massive, a gigantic stone. So what the Lord was saying was simply this Peter, based upon your bedrock statement that I'm the Christ, the son of the living God, I'm going to build a church.

So Jesus promised to build the church. Any church founded by any man is not the New Testament church. If you're if you're a part of a church that was founded by some man, if you can trace your roots back to some individual or individuals, you're not in the church that we read about in the New Testament. No. Jesus promised to build the church and listen to this.

He built the church and he bought it with his blood. You see, when Christ died on Calvary, he took that blood and built a church. 20 verse 28. Take heed to yourselves, to all the flock of which the Holy Spirit's made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood. Jesus built a church, and Jesus bought the church.

Paul said he loved the church, gave himself for it. Ephesians five, verse 25. So if Jesus built the church and bought the church and he did, wouldn't it stand to reason that it belongs to him? Let me think about it like this. If the Lord built the church on Peter or some large well, that would signify it was built upon fallible man.

And yet Jesus is infallible. He is the founder and the foundation. In first Corinthians chapter three, verse 11. Paul said, for other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Christ Jesus? Now Paul would say in Ephesians two, in verse 19, Jesus is not only the foundation of the church, he is the chief cornerstone.

Everything rest upon him. So we ask the question, where does your church begin? When did it begin? We talk about who founded the church you belong to. That's important. We need to ask those questions. But then here's another question. What did you do to become a member of the church that you belong to? Now, that's a very important question.

Now, if I understand the Scripture right, there's only one way to become a member of the church that I read about in the Bible. Somebody says, now, wait a minute. Are you telling me that there is an exclusive church or body and that there is a and that there is an exclusive pattern that I must follow to become a member of this church?

Well, guess you remember in Romans chapter six Paul said, God be thanked, that though you were the servants of sand, you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine delivered to you, and being set free from sin. He said, you became the servants of righteousness. When Paul said, you obeyed from the heart that form or that pattern of doctrine.

Now let's back up. Look at acts chapter two again. I said a moment ago in Matthew 16, Jesus promised Peter and the apostles that they would receive the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Key signified authority on Pentecost day you have these men. They were inspired men preaching and inspired message. They're presenting to those who were present to observe Pentecost.

They were presenting to them a narrative about the life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. Peter pointed out that Jesus now sits at the right hand of God. He seated upon a spiritual throne. In verse 36 he said, let all, let all the house of Israel know assuredly that this same Jesus, whom you crucified, God's made both Lord and Christ.

Now Luke said, when they heard that they were cut or pricked in their heart, and they wanted to know men and brethren, what shall we do? Now I want you to look at what Peter said. Again, bear in mind, the Lord said in John 16:13, after his departure, the comforter would come to them. He would convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment.

In verse 13 he said that they would be guided into all truth. So you have a divine spokesman. He is standing forth on Pentecost day and the other apostles and their preaching

an inspired message. And they want to know that it is those who are present want to know what do we need to do to be saved? What were they told to do?

The Bible says that they were told to repent. And Peter said, let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins. Well, what's the Bible? What does the Bible say about their response? In verse 41, the text tells us that those who gladly received his word were baptized. And that day about 3000 souls added to them.

In verse 47 the text says, and the Lord added to the church daily those who are being saved. Now here's what we can draw from that. Number one, the church was comprised of saved people, and those who were identified as saved were in the church. Now the church, the ecclesia, the called out the community of the saved. What then did they do to be added to the church?

We'll go back again and look at verse 38 and verse 41. When they repented of sin and were baptized into Christ, they were then added to the church. Well, what's the church? Well, the church is the community of the saved. Now, are you saying them that I've got to be a member of the church to go to heaven?

Well, you know, Paul said in Ephesians five verse 23, he is the Savior of the body that he is. Jesus is the Savior of the body. Here's a question. Well, how many bodies are there? I mean, I look around in the world today and there are literally hundreds of thousands of different denominational bodies. They wear different names, they practice different doctrines.

And yet the Bible says the Lord only built one church. He's only authorized one church to exist. You remember in Ephesians four verse four, Paul said, there's one body and one spirit, even as you're called, and one hope of your calling. Wait a minute. There's only one body. Well, what's the body? He's the head of the body of the church.

Colossians 1:18. In Ephesians 1:22 and 23, Paul said, he put all things in subjection under his feet, made him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. So the church and the body are one in the same. So let's ask this question. What did you do to become a member of the church that you belong to?

Now I know what the religious world says. I hear people saying all the time on the radio and on television, if you want to become a Christian, all you have to do is bow your head. Recite Sana's prayer. Accept the Lord Jesus into your heart and you're saved. Well, in your denomination that may be the case, but we're not talking about your denomination.

What we're asking is what church do you belong to? Now that's what you did to belong to your denomination. Understand that. But if you want to be a member of the Lord's church, the church that we read about in Scripture, you've got to do what they did 2000 years ago. No ifs and buts about it. Now, if we want to be, if we want to become a member of the church, that is, if we want to be a member of the saved body, we've got to do what Peter said.

Peter was an inspired spokesman, as worthy as the other apostles. Now, let me ask this question. Did they know what they were talking about? They were in doubt and authority. Peter said, repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. That is, by his authority. And Jesus said, he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. So that means those who believe and are baptized become saved.

Those who repent and are baptized enjoy forgiveness of sins. Paul said when he was baptized, his sins were washed away. Acts 22:16. And when we do that, we're then added to what? To the one church. Now, it might be that you've joined the church that you belong to. Maybe

somebody voted you into the church. But the Bible says that when you obey the gospel of the Lord, add you to the church.

First Corinthians chapter 12, verse 13 Paul said, by one spirit, or you all baptized into one body. Now when we ask the question, what church do you belong to? When it comes to worship on the first day of the week, did you know that there was a direct command to observe the Lord's Supper every first day of the week?

The Bible says the early church did that. Acts 20, verse seven. There was a divine command buttressing, buttressing that in First Corinthians chapter 11. The Lord Jesus instituted this memorial feast. Well, how often would they do it? Well, they did it every first day of the week. 20 verse seven. Do you predict the Lord's Supper every first day of the week?

That's what the New Testament church did. And when we talked about worship, did you know that in the New Testament church that is the church we read about in the Bible? Jesus said that God's interested in people worshiping him in spirit and in truth. In the New Testament church in the first century, they didn't use mechanical instruments in worship to God.

No, they sang with grace on their hearts to the Lord. Colossians chapter three, verse 16. No, the Bible says that we sing. We don't play an instrument. Matter of fact, did you know that many of the religious denominations that exist today that some of those men identified as founding fathers, that they objected to the usage of instruments of music in worship?

Why? Because they didn't believe there was any authority for it. So when we asked the question, what church do you belong to? There are some identifying marks of the New Testament church, and I can tell if I'm a member of the New Testament by honoring what this book says. But I've got to make sure that I'm going by the Bible.

If you're not a member of the church that you read about in the scriptures, my appeal to you is please obey the gospel. Do what they did on Pentecost day. God led you to the church and be faithful till death. See you next week.