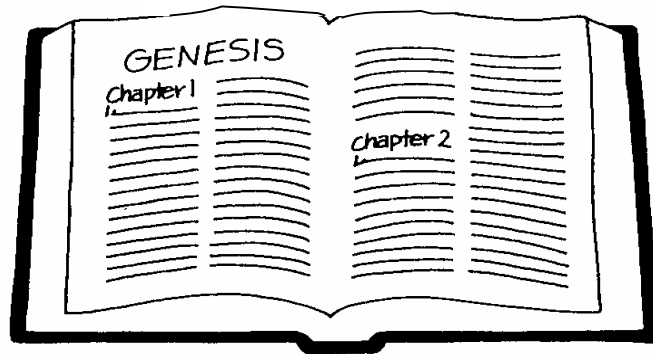


The Church

Correspondence Course #6



Introduction:

God's covenants were designed to bring people to repentance (Galatians 3). Covenants are laws (testaments) which dictate conditions for one to be a recipient of God's grace. Within God's new covenant, the New Testament, we find a spiritual organization known as the church (Rom. 14:17). This lesson is designed to help you understand what the Bible says about the church that Jesus died for (Acts 20:28).

The Church:

The word "church" is first found in our Bibles in Matthew 16:18-19. Jesus was speaking with his disciples regarding who men were saying He was. Jesus then asked his disciples who *they* thought Jesus was. Peter spoke up and said, *"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, blessed art thou, Simon Barjonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven. And I also say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my **church**; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. I will give unto thee the keys of the **kingdom of heaven**: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."* (Matt. 16:16-20)

Keys unlock and allow entrance. Peter was given the keys to the kingdom of heaven. The terms, or conditions, for one to enter the kingdom of heaven were therefore given to Peter. We find Peter exercising the use of these *keys* first to the Jews in Acts 2 and then to the Gentiles in Acts 10. Peter preached terms for entering into the kingdom of God which included hearing, believing, confessing that Jesus is the Christ and being baptized for the remission of sins (Cf. Correspondence course # 7).

Notice that the kingdom of heaven, or kingdom of God, is used synonymously with the word *church* in Matthew 16 above. Another example of this is found in Matthew 26 as Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. Jesus said, "*But I say unto you, I shall not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's **kingdom***" (Matt. 26:29). The apostle Paul revealed what this kingdom was in I Corinthians 11 when we find the disciples partaking of the Lord's Supper in the church! Obviously then, in many cases, the word church is used as an equivalent term to the kingdom of God.

The church in prophecy:

The church, the kingdom of God in prophecy.	Establishment of the church, the kingdom of God (Acts 2).
The Kingdom was to come through the seed of David (II Sam. 7:12-17).	Fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:30).
The kingdom would be established in the latter days (Isa. 2:2-3 and Dan. 2:28).	Matt. 3:1-2; Luke 3:1-2. Fulfilled on Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:16-17 and Acts 3:24).
The kingdom of God would come with power (Mk. 9:1; Luke 24:49; Acts 1:6-8)	Fulfilled on Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).
The kingdom would be established on Zion (Jerusalem) (Isa. 2:2-3).	Fulfilled on Pentecost (Acts 2:1,5,47 and Heb. 12:18-23).
The kingdom would begin at the point of the law going forth from Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3; Luke 24:45-49).	Law went forth from Jerusalem on Pentecost (Acts 2:37-38).
The Church or Kingdom of God is now Established.	

This spiritual organization known as the church of Christ (Romans 16:16) was foretold of coming into existence hundreds of years before it actually came. Examine the chart above, and please take the time to look up the scriptures. Remember that the word *church* is used synonymously with the word *kingdom* as illustrated above.

The Pentecost, which preceded the crucifixion of Jesus, found the twelve apostles tarrying in Jerusalem as Jesus had commanded them (Luke 24:47-49; Acts 2:1, 5 etc.). The apostles all received the "power" of the Holy Spirit while in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1-4). Peter stood in the forefront and preached the first gospel sermon, which identified the sins of the hearers (Acts 2:22-23) and told them what they needed to do to have those sins remitted (Acts 2:37-38).

According to all the prophecies mentioned on the chart, there can be no doubt that the church of Jesus Christ was established at this point. Everything before Acts 2 points forward to the church and everything after Acts 2 points back to it. For example, in Acts 2:47 Luke recorded, "*and the Lord added to them day by day those that were saved.*" That which the saved were added to was the church! Consider Acts 5:11; "*great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all that heard these things.*" Again, notice Acts 8:1: "*there arose on that day a great persecution against the church which was in Jerusalem...*" There are many other passages we could examine that prove the same idea. The church, at this point, is spoken of in the past tense. The church was obviously already established in the passages after Acts 2. Thus all scriptures dealing with the kingdom of God, or church, before Acts 2 point directly to Pentecost, and all scriptures speaking of the church after Acts 2 point right back to it. The kingdom of God, the church, was established on the day of Pentecost and continues on even unto today.

The church (kingdom of God) has a king or head:

This kingdom has a king: Jesus. The apostle Paul said, "*He (Jesus) must reign (as king) till he hath put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be abolished is death*" (I Cor. 15:25-26). The apostle Paul told the brethren in Colossi that Jesus "*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*" (Colossians 1:18). The word head used here is *kaphale* in the Greek language, which is defined as, "supreme, chief, prominent; of persons, master, lord" (Thayer 345). Every physical body has a head that directs and nourishes. As head of the church, the body of Christians, Jesus gives nourishment and direction. Christians are fed spiritual food by the head, Jesus (Eph. 4:15; I Pet. 2:1-3), and the Christians' manner of life (direction) is dictated by our Lord's teachings (Eph. 4:1-2; 5:24; Col. 3:17).

The church is the body of Christ:

Jesus Christ is the head of the body (church). Defining the church may help us understand that it is the body of Christ. Church (*ekklesia*) = "a gathering of

citizens called out from their homes into some public place; an assembly" (Thayer 195-196). The word is used in the NT with reference to the **body of saints** that have been called out of a world of darkness and into the marvelous light (I Peter 2:9). Vines expository dictionary of NT words defines the word church as having "two applications to companies of Christians, (a.) to the whole company of the redeemed throughout the present era (Matt. 16:18) and (b.) in the singular number, to a company consisting of professed believers (in any given location jcr), e.g., Acts 20:28; I Cor. 1:2 etc." (76).

The church, then, is comprised of Christians who make up a "**body**." The apostle Paul said that God "*put all things in subjection under His (Jesus') feet, and gave him to be head over all things to **the church, which is his body**, the fullness of him that filleth all in all*" (Eph. 1:22-23). While speaking of the church to the Corinthian brethren, Paul said, "*for the body is not one member, but many*" (I Cor. 12:14). To the Romans Paul said, "*we who are many, are one body in Christ, and severally members of one another*" (Romans 12:5).

Notice that the scriptures are very clear regarding the oneness of the body of Christ. The apostle Paul told the Ephesians, "*there is **one body**, and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of our calling;*" (Eph. 4:4). This one body has one doctrine or teaching as well, which sets it apart from any other body (I Cor. 12:12; Eph. 4:5; II Jn. 9-11). The church belonging to Jesus is identified by its teachings!

The organization of the church:

The body of Christians known as the church has organization (Phil. 1:1). Nowhere in our Bibles do we find church organization on a universal level. Organization exists only on a local level in our NT (Cf. I Cor. 1:2; Phil. 1:1 etc.). Any religious body organizing itself differently than God's standard reveals is sinful (I Jn. 3:4).

The word organization is defined as "something comprising elements with varied functions that contribute to the whole and to collective functions; organism" (AHD 876). The apostle Paul revealed church organization in Phil. 1:1 saying, "*Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus that are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.*" The definition of organization reveals the local church to be organized with the elements of **bishops, deacons** and **saints**! Each of these elements has various functions in the church to perform.

The work of the church:

The word work is defined as "an exertion of energies to accomplish a task or goal" (AHD 1390). There are three primary tasks for the church to accomplish revealed in the scriptures. First, there is the work of edification ("the act of one who promotes another's growth in Christian wisdom, piety, holiness and happiness" Thayer 440). Examples of edification are found in Ephesians 4:12-16 and Hebrews 10:24-25. The church works at promoting spiritual growth in its members.

Secondly, the work of the church includes evangelizing the lost (Acts 13:1-5; I Cor. 9:1-14; Eph. 3:10; Phil. 4:15). Since the church has the divine command to “*make known the manifold wisdom of God*” (Eph. 3:10). Every community has men and women who need the gospel message. It is the work of the church to get the saving message of Jesus to its community and to support other preachers in other areas as it has the opportunity.

Thirdly, the work of the church is providing benevolence for its own needy. The word benevolence is a broad term that may be summarized by the phrase “bearing burdens.” The word burden “denotes a weight, anything pressing on one physically (Matt. 20:12) or that makes a demand on one’s resources, whether material (I Thess. 2:6-9), spiritual (Rev. 2:24) or religious (Acts 15:28)” (Vines 149). Benevolence is limited in respect to the work of the church (cf. Acts 2:45; 4:32; 6:1; 11:29; Rom. 15:25-26; I Cor. 16:1; II Cor. 8:4; 9:1, 12; I Tim. 5). The only authorized relief offered as a work of the church is to its own members, not the world! One will search in vain to find a command, example or inference of a NT church offering aid to the needy of the world (non-Christians). Jesus said, “*the poor you have with you always*” (Matt. 26:11) and, therefore, even if the church tried to help the world’s needy it could never succeed.

QUESTIONS:

1. "The kingdom of God is not _____ and _____, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Romans 14:17).
2. Where is the word *church* first found in the NT?
3. The phrase "kingdom of God" is often equivalent to what word in the NT?
4. Paul told the brethren of Colossi that Jesus "*is the head of the body, the _____: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence*" (Colossians 1:18).
5. How many bodies (church) did Jesus die for? (cf. I Cor. 12:12-13)
6. Examine to chart above (pg. 2) and answer the following questions:
 - a. Who was the kingdom to come through?
 - b. When was the kingdom to be established?
 - c. How would the kingdom of God come?
 - d. Where would the kingdom be established?
 - e. What would go forth from Jerusalem that would mark the beginning of the kingdom of God?
7. Upon what day was the kingdom of God established?
8. What terms of admission did Peter preach on Pentecost? (hint: cf. Acts 2:37-38):
9. How many souls were added to the church that day? (Acts 2:41)
10. How is the church organized?
11. What is the work of the church?

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