

What Is The Church Of Christ?

by Walton Weaver

The word rendered “church” is found over 100 times in our New Testament. It describes a gathering, assembly or congregation of people, whether secular (Acts 19:32) or religious (Matt. 16:18), or whether a local group (1 Cor. 1:2), or universal (Eph. 1:22), or distributive (Acts 8:1). Who were these people who are identified with this term in the New Testament?

A Saved People

The church is the body of Christ, a body over which Christ rules as head (Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23; Col. 1:18). Christ is also the Savior of this body of people (Eph. 5:23), the body which consists of all the saved throughout the whole world. What makes one a Christian also makes him a member of this church. There is no such thing as being saved and not being a member of the body of Christ, the church. All those who are saved are added to the number of the saved, the church, and they are added as they are saved (Acts 2:47). Since the Lord does the adding, according to this passage, there is no risk of one getting into the wrong body, or church. The Lord adds to “*the church*” (KJV), which means there is only *one* church, or body (see Eph. 4:4, “there is one body,” and Eph. 1:22, “the church, which is his body”), for him to add a saved person to. This is Christ’s church. The one he said he would build in Matthew 16:18. Christ adds the saved to *his* church.

To repeat: whatever one does to be saved also makes him a part of Christ’s body, which is the body of the saved. Those present on the day of Pentecost heard the first gospel sermon preached under the authority of the great commission (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16). Jesus had promised that repentance and remission of sins would be preached in his name beginning at this time in Jerusalem (Luke 24:47). Peter commanded the people to “repent and be baptized . . . in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins . . .” (Acts 2:38). Luke reports that there were many who “gladly received his word” and “were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (v. 41). As more people continued to be saved the Lord also added them to this number of the saved (v. 47).

At the time one repents and is baptized for the remission of sins, he is baptized into Christ (Rom. 6:3-4) and into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). In this process of being saved one is translated out of the power of darkness into the kingdom of God’s dear Son (Col. 1:13). Nothing else is to be done for one to become a member of the church we read about in the Bible. The church of the Bible is not something one “joins” after he has been saved. The Lord’s church is the body of the saved, made up of all nationalities of people who have been reconciled “unto God in one body, by the cross” (Eph. 2:13-16).

A Possessed People

The church of the Bible is a people purchased and owned by Jesus Christ. Jesus’ promise was that he would build a church for himself. His own words were, “I will build MY church” (Matt. 16:18, emphasis mine--ww). While the church belongs to God (i. e., on a local level, “the church of God which is at Corinth,” 1 Cor. 1:2), it also belongs to Jesus Christ by right of

purchase (Acts 20:28). Those who make up the church of Christ are those who have been “loosed” from their sins “by his blood” (Rev. 1:5) and have been made to be “a kingdom, to be priests unto his God and Father” (Rev. 1:6).

This church is the object of Christ’s love. The reason he has freed us from sins is because he “loves us,” according to Revelation 1:5. Christ loved the church and gave himself for it (Eph. 5:25). Only those for whom Christ died and who have been baptized into his name belong to Christ (1 Cor. 1:12-13). Christ “gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a people for his own possession . . .” (Titus 2:14). Because of his great love for the church, he gave himself up for her (Eph. 5:25), and thereby became the Savior of the body (Eph. 5:23).

A Separated People

The church is a separated people who have been called out of the world by the gospel of Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 2:14). It is the response to this divine call that has separated these people from all others and made them the body of Christ. As a separated people, though living in the world, they are not a part of it (Jn. 17:15-17). Instead, they have been “delivered” out of the “power of darkness” and “translated un into the kingdom of the Son of his love” (Co. 1:13). They are now “new creatures” in Christ (2 cor. 5:17), so that the church is a new creation of God, “created in Christ Jesus for good works” (Eph. 2:10). This new society of people in the world are a new people because they have been “washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:11). Paul calls this a “washing of water by the word” (Eph. 5:26), and a “washing of regeneration” (Tit. 3:5), obvious references to baptism in water (see also Acts 22:16 and Heb. 10:22) . The purpose of Christ’s death was that he might sanctify the church (set it apart, make it holy) in this way (Eph. 5:25-26).

A Submissive People

Each member of the Lord’s church belongs to Christ and is separated from the world, but not as an end in itself. As a body of people who have been saved and are now “joined to Christ,” all who make up this body should now bring forth fruit unto God (Rom. 7:4). Paul also describes the individual members of this body as having been “baptized into death” (Rom. 6:4). Oh, yes, they were baptized into Christ’s death (Rom. 6:3), and as a result they have received the benefits of his death for them. But they were also baptized into their own death to sin and raised up with Christ into “newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). We died with Christ, were buried with Christ, and were raised up with Christ into a new way of life. The living of a new life was the ultimate purpose of our spiritual death and resurrection with Christ in baptism. The contrast is between who and what we were submissive to before our conversion and who and what we are submissive to since our conversion.

Notice that Paul says that we were raised up with Christ in our baptism “that we might walk in newness of life.” The word “walk” is significant. We were not just raised up from the waters of baptism that we might have a new life, but that we might *walk* in this new life. This word describes our behavior, our way of life, our daily conduct. This means that we are to live a holy life; a life of submissiveness, a life of obedience to God.

Paul uses the subjection of the church to Christ as grounds for an appeal for wives to be

submissive to their husbands in everything (Eph. 5:24). He is using the fact that the church is the body of Christ, and that Christ is the head of this body, to show how the church is subject to Christ. For Paul, this shows that wives also ought to be subject to their husbands. The figure of the church as a body and its relation to the head is a beautiful way of illustrating the relation between the church and Christ. What better illustration could have been chosen to demonstrate the fact that the church is a people who are subject to Jesus Christ in all things? What can the members of one's body do apart from the head that controls the body? When one attempts to act independently of Christ who is his head, he thereby removes himself from Christ as his head, like the teachers at Colosse who were advocating a "vain philosophy" (Col. 2:8, 19). God's people are to be subject to Christ in all things.