

Investigating
MORMONISM
Series

**How to
Find the
One
True Church**



How To Find the One True Church

Do you belong to the one true church? Many people believe they *do* belong to it. But if you ask for a description of that church, you will get many divergent answers. Some think the true church can be identified by its name, organizational structure, or apostolic succession. However, since it is the Bible that first introduced the concept of the church, then the Bible is where we must look for its true definition.

The Builder of the Church

The first time the church is mentioned in the Bible is in Matthew 16:18, where Jesus said to Peter, "Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Some people get so sidetracked defining the "rock" that they miss the main point in this verse. Jesus said, "I will build my church . . .". If Jesus builds the church, then whether the "rock" is Peter, revelation, or Christ Himself, it will be accomplished! Jesus did not say His apostles nor any other mortal would build the church. He said, "I will build my church!" Since Jesus also claimed in Matthew 28:18, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth . . .," He surely could build the church as He said He would do! If He did not do that, who knows whether or not He will come again or do anything *else* He said He would do?

Not only did Jesus say, "I will build my Church," but He went on to say, "and the gates of hell (Hades) shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). The dictionary defines "Hades" as the realm of the dead. Obviously, the "gate" into that realm is death. So death will not prevail against the church. This means that even though all the apostles and other early Christians died

or were killed, the church will still endure because Christ is building it! Often hell or Hades is associated with Satan and his followers. But all that is hell cannot prevail against the church because Christ, who has all power in heaven and earth, is building it!

Acts 2:47 reports, "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." This was after the Lord Jesus ascended to glory in Acts 1:9. So Jesus was doing what He said He would do after He had bodily left the earth! And because Jesus lives forever (Hebrews 7:24-25), He never appointed a successor to add anyone to His church. He is still doing that Himself! Ephesians 1:22-23 says God ". . . gave Him (Christ) to be head over all things to the church, which is His body . . ." And Ephesians 5:23 says, "Christ is the head of the church." Notice the present tense verbs in those texts, indicating He is now and will continue to be involved in His church. Yet, these verses were written long after Jesus' ascension, which shows that He did not need to be bodily on earth to be head of His church! He is also the Foundation of the church (I Corinthians 3:11) as well as Author and Finisher of the faith (Hebrews 12:2).

How the Church Is Preserved

Since He is head over all things to the church, He shares some responsibility for its continued existence! The church is a living organism called "the body of Christ." Ephesians 5:29-30 says it is the Lord who ". . . nourisheth (gives strength) and cherisheth (lovingly cares for) the church; for we (the church) are members of His body." Can something destroy the church while "the Lord God omnipotent" (Revelation 19:6) is building and caring for it? If it can, He does not

have *all* power in heaven and earth as He claimed in Matthew 28:18. Furthermore, if Christians are "members of His body" (Ephesians 5:30), and "He is the head of the body, the church" (Colossians 1:18), then He is inseparable from the church because they are one body! This Biblical picture was used to show that Christ cannot be separated from His Church because it is His body! Sometimes people claim to love Christ but not the church. Can you imagine a man telling his wife, "I love your head but I don't like your body"? Does that make sense? The head and body are inseparable for Christ and the church as well as for any person. "Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it," Ephesians 5:23 declares. One who truly loves Christ will also love that which He loved so much He gave His life for it!

The Structure of the Church

While there is organization in the church, the Bible never calls it an organization or a denomination. Nor does the New Testament say that the church is to be organized a certain way. The only offices listed with qualifications are bishops (same office as pastor or elder) and deacons (I Timothy 3:1-13). Some claim Christ's church must have apostles and prophets in its organization because they are mentioned in Ephesians 4:11. But that verse just mentions the gifted men the Lord gave the church. It is not presenting the church's organizational structure. Paul warns of false apostles in II Corinthians 11:13. In revelation 2:2 Jesus said to the church at Ephesus: "Thou hast tried them who say they are apostles and are not, and hast found them liars." Jesus also warned of false prophets in Matthew 7:15 and 24:11 and 24. Therefore, just because a church has apostles and prophets does not make it the

true church! Organizational structure is never given in scripture as a means of identifying the true church.

The Name of the Church

Nor is the name of the church even officially stated in the Bible. The church is called the "church of God" seven times, twice it is called "the churches of God," once "the church of the firstborn," and once "the churches of Christ". Strange as it may seem, it is *never* called "the church of Jesus Christ"! The followers of Christ were called "Christians" (Acts 11:26), "Nazarenes" (Acts 24:5), "saints" (Philippians 1:1), "the Way" (Acts 22:4), "believers" (I Timothy 4:12), and so on. The various names used show the relative unimportance New Testament Christians saw in the name.

Entrance Into the Church

The word "church" is translated from the original Greek word *ekklesia* which means "assembly". *Ekklesia* comes from two other Greek words: *ek* meaning "out" and *kaleo* meaning "to call". So the church is literally "a called out assembly" of believers in Jesus Christ. Sometimes "church" refers to all believers who have ever lived up to the present time. Thus far we have been using "church" in this universal sense. No one ever "joined" that one true church. Everyone in it was added by the Lord Himself (Acts 2:47).

But who did the Lord add? Acts 2:47 says it is those who are saved. And how does one get saved? That is the same question the Philippian jailer asked. Paul and Silas responded: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved . . ." (Acts 16:30-31). Thus, salvation comes by faith in Christ (see John 1:12, 3:16-17;

Romans 10:9-10; I Peter 1:9). But from what are men saved? Romans 5:9 says "we shall be saved from wrath through Him." From what wrath are believers saved? The wrath of God against all ungodliness and unbelief (see Romans 1:18 and Revelation 21:8). Because "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), all men deserve God's wrath. Romans 6:23 says that "the wages of sin is death" or eternal separation from God (II Thessalonians 1:7-9). Although we deserve eternal death because of our sin, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (I Timothy 1:15) from that penalty. I Corinthians 15:3 declares, "Christ died for our sins." That is why we call Jesus our "Savior". Hebrews 7:25 also says, "He (Jesus) is able also to save them to the uttermost that come to God by Him . . .". As soon as He saves believers, He also adds them to His body, the church!

What Church Membership Does

When the Lord adds believers to His body, they are to function together something like the various parts of a human body functioning together (see I Corinthians 12). Believers are not expected to live in isolation from other believers. Hebrews 10:25 urges believers not to forsake the assembling of themselves together. Obviously not all believers who have ever lived on earth can fellowship together because many have already died and many others are scattered all over the world. But groups of believers can meet together in local areas just like the churches at Corinth, Galatia, Antioch, and so on in the New Testament. The word "church" in the New Testament usually refers to such local bodies of believers. They are to meet together regularly for fellowship, study, worship, service, and so on.

But joining a local assembly never made anyone a Christian. That takes genuine faith in Christ which involves repentance or turning away from known sin (Acts 3:19) to a new lifestyle which reflects a Christ-likeness (Romans 8:29). While good works never saved anyone, they are the fruit or external evidence of genuine faith in Christ (Ephesians 2:8-10). An electric light does not generate electricity when it is on, but it gives light because it is connected to the source of power. Likewise, Christians do not generate eternal life by their works, but their works should show that they are connected to the source of spiritual power. Thus Christians ought to be "zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14) that will cause men to glorify God (Matthew 5:16).

Identifying the One True Church

How then does one identify the one true church? There is an obvious answer to that question. Any church that has the one true Savior! Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me" (John 14:6). Paul wrote in I Timothy 2:5, "There is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus." Any church that proclaims Jesus Christ of the Bible as the *only* means of salvation is part of the body of Christ or the one true church. Peter said in Acts 4:12, "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." That name is "Jesus Christ" (Acts 4:10). Are you trusting only in Him for salvation? Remember, it is not the church of Christ that saves. It is the Christ of the church!

—Marvin W. Cowan