

The New Testament Church

Part I: The Importance of Studying the Church

Matthew 16:13-20

I. INTRODUCTION: I

1. **2** The Greek word for “church” appears 115 times in the Greek New Testament; from Matthew 16:18 to Revelation 22:16.
2. In his gospel, Matthew records Jesus’ promise to build an indestructible “church” upon the rock of Peter’s confession that Jesus is, “...*the Christ, the Son of the living God.*” (Matt 16:16). Several decades later in the vision he received on Patmos, John tells us of the testimony of the victorious Christ to “*the churches*” (Rev. 22:16).
 - A. The concepts of “*My church*” and “*the churches*” ought to stir the interest of all spiritually-minded people.
 - B. Because of our identification with Christ and things spiritual our desire should be to learn more and to know accurately about the concept of the “church” as revealed on the inspired pages of the New Testament (NT); especially as we consider that Jesus “*purchased with His own blood*” “*the church*” (Acts 20:28).
3. As with many concepts in the NT, there is a great deal of misinformation and false teaching about “*the church.*” This inaccurate information comes not just from denominational sources because our own brethren are not immune to careless and sloppy study or “traditional” approaches to this important subject.
 - A. For example, prolonged dependency on Bible class material and tracts pertaining to “*the church*” that reflect “traditional” thinking have perpetuated ideas, which, in some cases, have contributed to thinking, speaking and acting in ways that are not supported by the best textbook on the subject: the New Testament.
 - B. In my years of trying to teach others the gospel of Christ there are many topics which generate controversy and rejection of the truth. But, without a doubt the two most controversial subjects I’ve encountered when trying to teach others are:
 - (1) The gospel plan of salvation (i.e., hear, believe, confess, repent, baptism), and,
 - (2) The church (e.g., its purpose, singular nature, establishment, organization, worship, work, etc.).
4. To confirm the importance of studying the church one only has to look at the state of “Christendom.” Despite Jesus’ prayer (Jn. 17:20-23), Paul’s plea (1 Cor. 1:10-13), and God’s plan (Eph. 4:1-6) “Christendom” is hopelessly fractured and divided into a multitude of sects; each with its peculiar name, doctrine, organization, worship and work.
5. **3** Nobody knows exactly how many denominations there are, but here are some estimates:
 - A. According to the *World Christian Encyclopedia* (David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, Todd M. Johnson, Oxford Univ. Press, 2nd edition, 2001) there are 33,000+denominations.
 - ☛ **Independents** (~22,000; All of these are clearly “**Protestant**” in theology as well—charismatics, Pentecostals, evangelicals, Methodists, Reformed/Presbyterians, full gospel, “nondenominational,” Baptists, and Oneness Pentecostals).
 - ☛ **Protestants** (~9,000) (i.e., mainline Protestant denominations).

- ✦ **Marginals** (~1,600; "Marginal Christian" groups include Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, various "Arian" or pseudo-Christian cults, some Christian science or "mind science" cults, some Unitarian/Universalist groups, and tiny numbers of so-called Christian or Catholic "Gnostics.")
- ✦ **Orthodox** (781; The largest of these are the Russian Orthodox at **80 million members** of the **210 million total members** (year 1995 numbers). So it is within these groups, mainly separated by country or nationality, you get 781 Orthodox "denominations" (year 2000 numbers)
- ✦ **Roman Catholics** (242)
- ✦ **Anglican** (168)



- B. Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary database: 39,000 (2007); 55,000 (projected by 2025).
- C. According to *Evangelical Catholic Apologetics* web site there were 46,008 denominations on 3/2/15.
- D. **4** If it were not so serious it would be downright funny!
- ✓ Apostolic Faith Church Body of Jesus Christ of the Newborn Assembly
 - ✓ Our Most Holy Precious Lady of the Sacred Heart
 - ✓ Hebrew Pentecostal Church of God, Inc.
 - ✓ Power Pass Power Church of the Mountain Ministry, Inc.
 - ✓ Happy Go Lucky Church of Almighty God in Jesus Name Amen
 - ✓ Trigger Happy Ministry (Wonder if they are 'straight shooters'? Wonder how they practice "church discipline"!)
6. **5** Concepts (i.e., how and what we perceive things to be) are more than merely academic matters.
- A. There is a definite relationship between the way we think (concepts in our mind) and how we act (**Matt. 12:34**: "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks."; **Matt. 15:19**: "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.").
- B. Our words and actions are simply extensions of how and what we think; so if our concepts are wrong, our language and actions will reflect these erroneous ideas (**Prov. 23:7**: "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he."; **Prov. 4:23**: "Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life." **6** Concepts chart).
7. **7** And so it is in regards to "the church."
- A. Many notions (concepts) about "the church" spring from tradition rather than Truth; from creeds and not from Christ.
- B. It is critical we challenge our concepts of "the church" by turning to the pages of the NT and using it as our only guide in regards to this Bible subject, or any Bible subject (1 Pet. 4:11).
8. **8** To illustrate our need for this study, I want to give us a short "quiz" so we can test what our concept of the church is.

Quiz on “the church”:

- (1) When you think of the word “church” do you think of an “institution”? Yes No
 - (2) When you think of the “church,” for example when Jesus said “I will build My church”; do you think of an “institution” to which He “adds” people? Yes No
 - (3) When someone asks you “Where do you go to church?” Do you answer, “I go to the church of Christ.”?
 - (4) Do you believe that “congregations of the Church of Christ” are “sister churches” conveys an accurate idea about “the church”? Yes No
 - (5) When someone asks you the question “What are you religiously?” do you answer “I’m Church of Christ”? Yes No
 - (6) When someone wants to know “What does the Church of Christ believe/teach?” do you believe it proper to answer, “the Church of Christ teaches...”? Yes No
 - (7) Do you think that “we all need to be faithful to the Church”? Yes No
 - (8) Do you think “brethren who have fallen away from the Church need to come back to the Church”? Yes No
 - (9) In the Restoration Movement do you believe Alexander Campbell and likeminded people “restored the Church because it had fallen away”? Yes No
 - (10) Is “Attend the Church of Christ’s Choice” a slogan that accurately reflects a scriptural concept”? Yes No
 - (11) Does “Church of Christ Meets Here—Established A.D. 33” on a “church building” sign convey a scriptural correct idea? Yes No
9. **9** I respectfully suggest that if you answered “yes” to any of those questions it is an indication we need to re-study and re-think our concept of “the church.”
10. By suggesting this I do not mean to embarrass anyone and I hope you do not think I’m splitting hairs or nit-picking.
- A. This is more than just an issue of semantics and I’m not quibbling over harmless trivialities. The importance of these matters cannot be overemphasized.
 - B. Answering “yes” to any of these questions is symptomatic that we may have flawed concepts about “the church” which, if not corrected, could lead us to do, say, or teach things contrary to the truth.
11. In this series of lessons we will examine a number of matters pertaining to “the church” which we hope will lead all of us to a better and more complete understanding and appreciation for “the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). **10**

References:

- Chumbley, Kenneth L. (editor), *The Church of Jesus Christ*, Florida College Press, Temple Terrace, FL (2011).
- Cogdell, Gaston D. and Robert F. Turner, *The Cogdell-Turner Discussion: A Search For Truth*, Guardian of Truth Foundation, Fairmount, IN (1983).
- Cogdill, Roy, *The New Testament Church*, Guardian of Truth Foundation, Bowling Green, KY (date unknown).
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- Stauffer, L. A., *The Church: A Biblical Perspective*, Guardian of Truth Foundation, Bowling Green, KY (2006).