

to recognize the establishment of the New Testament church.

The established period. The Bible tells us *when* the church of the Lord would be established. In Daniel 2:44, we are told that in the time of “the fourth kingdom” God would set up a kingdom that would never be destroyed. Beginning with the time of Daniel in Babylonian rule, and going through the Medo-Persian and Grecian Empires, there was no new kingdom set up. God’s people were still under the Old Covenant. But during the time of the fourth kingdom (the Roman Empire), God did establish a new kingdom. Jesus promised that He would build His kingdom, the church (Mt. 16:18-19). On the Day of Pentecost following the Lord’s resurrection from the grave, the preaching of the Gospel opened up that “new” kingdom. Then, the Bible says that “the Lord added to the church daily...” (Acts 2:47). From this information, we can learn that the church of the New Testament was established on the Day of Pentecost in approximately A.D. 30. This is important, because most modern manmade denominations began between A.D. 1500 and 1800. Most modern churches were established *1500 years too late*. If the church of which you are a part was established at some time other than A.D. 30, it is *not* the church of the New Testament.

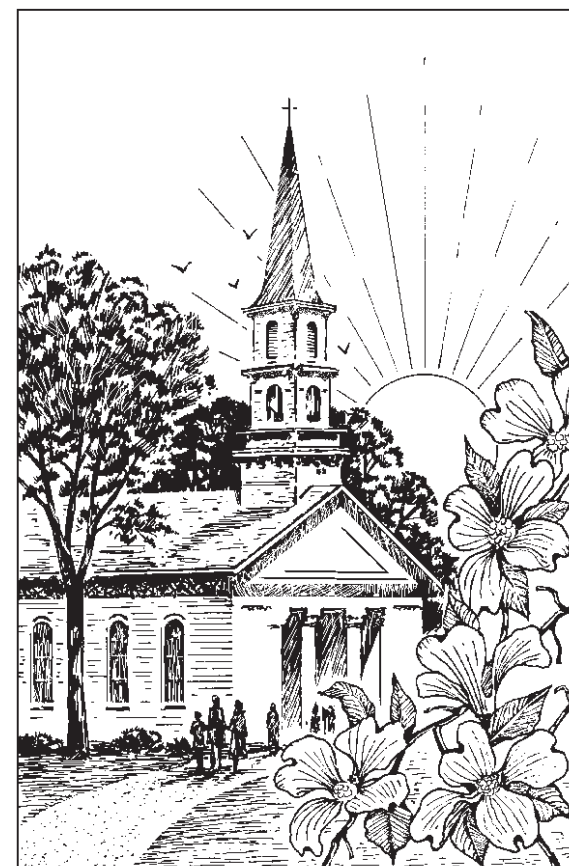
The Established Place. The Bible also tells us *where* the church of the Lord would be established. In Isaiah 2:1-4, God promised that the “Lord’s house” would be established in Zion, which in the context is the city of Jerusalem. It is important to note that Isaiah cannot be talking about the Old Testament temple, because it was still in existence during the time that Isaiah wrote. What, then, is the “house of the Lord” of which Isaiah is speaking? This phrase refers to the church of the Lord. In 1 Timothy 3:15, the Bible says that the “house of the Lord...is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of truth.” In Jerusalem, on the Day of Pentecost, the Lord’s church *was* established. And we are

told that, for the first time, “the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). Did the church of which you are a part begin in Jerusalem, or somewhere else? Please remember that most denominations in existence today began in either Europe or America.

The Establisher of the Church. Jesus Christ is the sole *Founder and Builder* of the church. Paul said that He alone could be the foundation. “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11). Jesus Himself promised that He would be the Builder of the church. “I will build My church...” (Mt. 16:18). The New Testament teaches that Jesus is the Owner of the church. In the Book of Acts, Luke referred to “...the church of the Lord, which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). Today, Jesus is still the Head of the New Testament church. “And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church...” (Eph. 1:21-23). In matters of doctrine, Jesus has all authority in His church. “All authority has been given to Me on Heaven and on Earth” (Mt. 28:18-20). Since the church is the bride of the Lord (Eph. 5:21-31), she should wear the name of her husband—Christ. These passages teach us that the church belongs solely to Jesus, and that it should follow *His* direction and wear *His* name. It is sinful for men to come along thousands of years later, name the church after some man, and invent human creeds for its adherents to follow. If we are going to be members of the Lord’s church, we must wear *His* name and follow *His* teaching. It is the Christian’s God-given responsibility to “prove all things” (1 Thess. 5:21). Let me encourage you to take this challenge seriously. After reading the Scriptures found in this tract, find out who established the church of which you are a member. Also, find out why the church of which you are a part wears a name other than the name of Christ. If the church of which you are a member was established by any other person than Jesus, and if it wears a manmade name, then it cannot be the church of the New Testament.

The Identity of the New Testament Church

Ben Bailey



Is the church the building or the people?

Two thousand years after the institution of the Lord's church, the ideal pattern for the New Testament church is largely ignored. In a world where an individual can find a denomination that believes and practices almost anything, it is becoming increasingly difficult to identify the New Testament church. However, simple laws of logic and reasoning tell us that a thing is made "according to its kind." In Genesis 1, the phrase "according to its kind" (or a similar statement) occurs eighteen times. By using this phrase, God is trying to tell us that a creation naturally follows a pattern. For example, birds are not created from monkeys, and giraffes do not follow the pattern of a whale. Each creation follows its maker's pattern. This lesson is extremely important when it comes to the nature and pattern of the New Testament church. If we will look to the Bible as the blueprint for the church, then we can tell if "a" church is "the" church of the New Testament. To identify the Lord's church in the midst of all the current denominational chaos, we first must identify what the church is *not*.

The church is not a building. The church of Christ is not composed of walls, ceilings, and pews. The bold martyr Stephen proclaimed, "God does not dwell in temples made with hands..." (Acts 7:48). Even during the time of the Israelites, God did not want His people to trust in the temple. In the days of Jeremiah the people cried out, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord" (Jer. 7:4). Yet, their trust in the building did not save them from impending Babylonian exile (Jer. 25:9-12). Buildings burn and temples fall, yet the church of the living God will stand forever because it is comprised of souls. The church of Christ as seen in the New Testament is made up of people, not pews, carpet or a pulpit (1 Cor. 12:27). May we never let our *sanctuary* become our *cemetery*! The church of Christ is not a building.

The church is not a denomination. The word "denomination" by its very definition is in direct contradiction with the New Testament

pattern. *Denomination* means to call or name something after another. In the New Testament, the idea of naming the church after a person other than Christ is strongly condemned. Paul said to the Corinthians, "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10). In this context, Paul is dealing with the root problem of denominationalism. Some were saying, "I am of Paul," or "I am Apollos," or "I am of Cephas" (1 Cor. 1:12). Paul pointed out that denominationalism is division by asking, "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or, were you baptized in the name of Paul?" (1 Cor. 1:13). For anyone who desires to have a church named after them, the Bible sets down two straightforward criteria. First, one must be crucified as a sinless sacrifice for his followers. No person on Earth today can serve as a sinless sacrifice (Heb. 10:12; Rom. 3:23). Second, the leader of any group must have the God-given authority to command baptism in his name. In the New Testament, there is no authority for baptizing into any man's name except Christ (Mt. 28:18-20). Therefore, denominationalism violates the pattern of the New Testament church. The church of Christ is not a denomination.

The church is not a social club. To many people, the church is little more than a glorified social club. It is a place to dress exquisitely for, and be seen rubbing elbows with, the elite of society. For some, "going to church" is nothing more than a good public-relations move. [It is interesting to note just how "religiously faithful" some candidates for political office become around election time!] The Jews had the mindset that their religion could be used for social purposes, but Jesus strongly rebuked them for such. He condemned the Jews because they wore elaborate clothing, coveted the best seats, and exalted the clerical title "rabbi" (Mt. 23:1-12). This same rebuke holds true for those who today who want to make the church into nothing more than a modern-day civic club. To understand that the church is not a social club, we need to realize that we are not the center of worship. *God* is to be the center of our worship, and we must make Him the focus of our

worship services (Jn. 4:24).

The church is not an afterthought. With the recent rise in premillennial fiction books such as the *Left Behind* series and others, the church is being looked upon more as an *afterthought* than an *original* plan. Many in the premillennial camp believe that God planned to set up a thousand-year reign on Earth, but that His plan was thwarted by the unbelieving Jews. The church, therefore, was created quickly as an afterthought until the original plan could be carried out successfully. While this may be an attractive view to many, the Bible teaches the church has *always* been God's *original* plan. Paul said that God was making His power known to princes and principalities through the church, which was "according to the eternal purpose" (Eph. 3:10-11). This passage clearly teaches that the church has been in the mind and plan of God throughout eternity. The church is much more than an *afterthought*. It is the *forethought* and divine plan of God that will last until Christ comes to receive it unto Himself (1 Cor. 15:24, Mt. 16:18-19).

The church of Christ is not a club for the elite of society, and it definitely is not a "quick fix" for an unexpected "mess-up" of God's original plan. Is the church that you attend more of a social club than a group of faithful Christians worshiping God? Does the church you attend focus its religion around the *building* more than the *people*? If so, then it is time to return to the pattern of the New Testament church.

The Nature Of The Church

If a group of people on an unknown island found a Bible, read it, and decided to do exactly what it said, what church would be the end result of their efforts? These people would not be able to set up any of the denominations we see in existence today because they would have no knowledge of the Restoration or Reformation movements. Rather, they would invariably end up with the church of the first century—and nothing more. Let us consider three characteristics needed