

What Does the Bible Say About the Church of Christ?

When people hear the words "church of Christ," many picture a denomination. They think of one group among many, each with its own name, its own creed, and its own way of doing things. The Bible does not speak that way. In Scripture the church of Christ is not a branch of something larger. It is the body Jesus promised to build and bought with His own blood. So before we settle on an opinion, we ought to ask a better question. What does the Bible actually say?

This study lets the Scriptures answer. Every point below rests on a passage you can open and read for yourself. Read them. Do not take a man's word for it, and do not take mine.

Jesus Built One Church

Jesus made a promise to His apostles. He said, *"I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"* ([Matthew 16:18](#)). Look closely at the words. He said "my church," not "my churches." He spoke of one church, and He claimed it as His own. He did not turn the work over to men to organize as they saw fit. He said He would build it.

He tied that church to the kingdom. In the next breath He said, *"And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven"* ([Matthew 16:19](#)). The church He would build and the kingdom He would open are spoken of together, and both were still future when He said it. The building had not yet begun.

The Prophets Foretold It

The church was no afterthought. Long before Jesus said "I will build my church," the prophets had been pointing to it. The kingdom He promised was the kingdom they had seen from far off. When we read them with Acts 2 in hand, we find that God had already fixed its time, its place, its King, and the kind of people it would hold.

Daniel fixed the time. Reading the king's dream of an image broken by a stone, he said, *"And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed"* ([Daniel 2:44](#)). The kingdoms in that dream ran from Babylon down to Rome. So the kingdom of God would be set up while Rome still stood, and once set up it would never fall. That is the very era in which Christ came and the church began.

Isaiah fixed the place and the reach. He said that in the last days the house of the LORD would be established above all others, and that all nations would flow to it, *"for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem"* ([Isaiah 2:2-3](#); see also [Micah 4:1-2](#)). The word would begin in one city and go out to every nation. That is exactly where Acts 2 opens, in Jerusalem, with men of every nation listening.

Joel described how it would begin. God said through him that He would pour out His Spirit, and that *"whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered"* ([Joel 2:28-32](#)). We do not have to guess whether that day came. On Pentecost Peter stood up and said of what they were seeing, *"this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel"* ([Acts 2:16](#)). The prophet named the day, and the apostle pointed to it as it arrived.

The prophets also named the King. God promised David that one of his sons would sit on his throne and reign ([2 Samuel 7:12-13](#); [Psalm 132:11](#)). Peter took up that promise in the same sermon and applied it to the risen Christ, saying that God had sworn to David that He *"would raise up Christ to sit on his throne"* ([Acts 2:30](#)). Then he declared that God had made the crucified Jesus *"both Lord and Christ"* ([Acts 2:36](#)). The King is not waiting to begin His reign. He took His throne when He rose and ascended, and He reigns now over His kingdom, the church.

Jeremiah named the kind of people it would hold. God said, *"I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel"* ([Jeremiah 31:31](#)), a covenant under which He would *"forgive their iniquity, and... remember their sin no more"* ([Jeremiah 31:34](#)). The church is the people of that new covenant, a people whose sins are forgiven and who know the Lord, not by birth and not by nation, but by His grace.

Put it together and the lines all meet at one point. One era, the days of Rome. One place, Jerusalem. One King, the risen Christ on David's throne. One people, the forgiven of the new covenant. When the church began in Acts 2, it did not surprise heaven. It kept a word that God had spoken for centuries.

When and Where It Began

The prophets fixed the era and the place, as we have just seen. Jesus narrowed the time to a single generation. He told some who stood with Him, *"That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power"* ([Mark 9:1](#)). Power was the marker, and He named its source. He told the apostles to wait in the city until they were *"endued with power from on high"* ([Luke 24:49](#)), and He said that power would come when the Holy Spirit came upon them ([Acts 1:8](#)).

All of it came together in Acts 2. The apostles were in Jerusalem. The Spirit came. Peter stood up and preached Christ crucified and raised. The people asked what they must do, and that day

about three thousand obeyed. From that point Luke writes of the church as a present body ([Acts 2:47](#)). What Jesus promised in Matthew 16, He built in Acts 2. The place was Jerusalem. The time was the day of Pentecost. We are not guessing.

Whose Church Is It?

The church does not belong to a man, a city, or a movement. It belongs to Christ. When Paul met with the elders from Ephesus, he charged them to feed *"the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood"* ([Acts 20:28](#)). A thing bought at that price is not ours to rename or remake to our liking. It was bought by the blood of the Lord, and it answers to Him.

Paul says the same when he writes of Christ and the church together. *"Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it"* ([Ephesians 5:25](#)). The church is the object of His love and the purchase of His death. That settles the question of ownership. When we speak of the church of Christ, we are not naming a party. We are saying whose it is.

How the Scriptures Describe It

Because the church belongs to Him, the New Testament describes it in ways that point back to God and to Christ, never to men. Paul wrote, *"The churches of Christ salute you"* ([Romans 16:16](#)). He addressed one letter to *"the church of God which is at Corinth"* ([1 Corinthians 1:2](#)). He called it *"the body of Christ"* ([Ephesians 4:12](#)), and the Scriptures speak of *"the church of the firstborn"* ([Hebrews 12:23](#)).

These are descriptions, not denominational titles. They tell us who built the church, who bought it, and who is its head. No passage authorizes a name that honors a man, a doctrine of men, or a form of government. Where the Scriptures give glory to Christ, we have no liberty to hand it to someone else.

One Body Under One Head

The church is described as a body, and a body has one head. God *"gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body"* ([Ephesians 1:22-23](#)). Paul says it again plainly: *"And he is the head of the body, the church"* ([Colossians 1:18](#)). Christ is not a figurehead set over many competing bodies. He is the living head of one.

That is why Paul insists there is one body. *"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling"* ([Ephesians 4:4](#)). He does not say two, or many. He counts the church the way a man counts his own frame, where many members still make a single whole. *"But now are they many members, yet but one body"* ([1 Corinthians 12:20](#)).

So when men ask which church is the right one, they have already misread the New Testament. The Bible does not set out a shelf of churches to choose from. It speaks of one body under one head, and it invites every obedient believer into that one body.

The Foundation

A building stands on its foundation, and this one rests on Christ alone. Paul wrote, *"For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ"* ([1 Corinthians 3:11](#)). When Peter confessed that Jesus was *"the Christ, the Son of the living God"* ([Matthew 16:16](#)), the Lord said He would build His church upon that truth. The church is not founded on Peter, on a council, or on any later teacher. It is built on Christ, the Son of God.

How a Person Enters It

A person does not enter the church the way he joins a club, by application and a vote. Luke is careful about how it happens. *"And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved"* ([Acts 2:47](#)). The Lord does the adding. Our part is to obey Him, and He puts the obedient into His body.

What did those first people do? They heard the gospel preached and were cut to the heart ([Acts 2:37](#)). They asked what to do. Peter answered, *"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins"* ([Acts 2:38](#)). Then Luke records, *"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls"* ([Acts 2:41](#)). They heard, they believed, they repented, they were baptized, and the Lord added them.

The rest of the New Testament tells the same story. A man must believe that Jesus is the Christ ([Mark 16:16](#)). He must confess that faith with his mouth ([Romans 10:9-10](#)). He must repent of his sins ([Acts 17:30](#)). He must be baptized into Christ ([Galatians 3:27](#)), where his sins are washed away ([Acts 22:16](#)). There is no other door. The same Lord who added souls in Acts 2 adds them now, on the same terms.

If you have never done this, then whatever else you have done, you have not yet entered the church you are reading about. That is not said to wound you. It is said so you will not rest on something the Bible never promised.

How It Worships

The first church did not invent its worship. It continued in what the apostles taught. *"And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers"* ([Acts 2:42](#)). Each part of that worship can be read on the page.

They held to the apostles' doctrine and gave themselves to it. They came together on the first day of the week to break bread, that is, to eat the Lord's supper, *"And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them"* ([Acts 20:7](#)). They gave as God had prospered them, *"Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store"* ([1 Corinthians 16:2](#)). They prayed together ([Acts 2:42](#)). And they sang, *"Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord"* ([Ephesians 5:19](#); see also [Colossians 3:16](#)).

These are not human ceremonies added over the centuries. They are what the Lord's people did when the church was new, and they are what He still asks of those who wear His name.

How It Is Organized

Christ is the head, and under Him each congregation is given a simple, local government. There is no earthly headquarters in the New Testament, no central office set over the churches, no single man placed above them. The pattern is plain. In each congregation, qualified men called elders, also named bishops and overseers, shepherd the flock, and deacons serve under them. Paul addressed a letter *"to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons"* ([Philippians 1:1](#)).

Elders were appointed in every church ([Acts 14:23](#); [Titus 1:5](#)). The Scriptures list their qualifications carefully ([1 Timothy 3:1-7](#); [Titus 1:5-9](#)), and they describe the work of deacons as well ([1 Timothy 3:8-13](#)). Peter charged the elders to *"Feed the flock of God which is among you"* ([1 Peter 5:2](#)), each one tending the congregation that was among him, not lording over others. Every church stood on its own under Christ. That is the whole structure, and it needs no addition.

Its Members Wear Christ's Name

The members of this church wore one name. *"And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch"* ([Acts 11:26](#)). Peter wrote that if a man suffers as a Christian he should not be ashamed, but *"let him glorify God on this behalf"* ([1 Peter 4:16](#)). The name fits, because they belonged to Christ.

Paul warned against wearing the names of men. When some at Corinth began to say they were of Paul, or of Apollos, or of Cephas, he asked, *"Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?"* ([1 Corinthians 1:13](#)). The questions answer themselves. No man died for the church. No man bought it. So no man's name belongs on it. There is one name given for our salvation, *"for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved"* ([Acts 4:12](#)).

The Question That Remains

The church of Christ is not hard to find in the Bible, because it is not a human invention waiting to be designed. It was promised by Christ, built by Christ, bought by Christ, and named for Christ. It has one head, one body, one foundation, one door, and one pattern of worship and work. None of that is hidden. It is written down for anyone willing to read.

So the question is not really whether such a church can be identified. The question is whether you are in it. Have you heard the gospel and obeyed it as those first hearers did? Have you been added by the Lord, or have you only joined something men built? These are not comfortable questions, but they are honest ones, and they are the questions the Bible presses on every one of us.

If you have obeyed, then thank God and be faithful. If you have not, the door has not moved. The same Lord who added the saved in Jerusalem will add you on the same terms, the moment you obey Him. Do not wait. Do not argue it down. Read the passages again, and do what they say.

Every Scripture reference in this study links to the King James Version. Open it and read for yourself.