

What is the Church Christ founded?

Introduction



When I was a young boy I was required to “go to church” with my Mom and attend Sunday school. My Dad was a member, just not an active member who attended once a year at Easter. I do know that Dad was a moral person and set an excellent example of honesty, dedication to his wife and family and demonstrated his love for us in so many ways.

The church we attended was a Lutheran Church. To me the church was a place, a building where we went on Sunday for an hour and then went home to do what ever we pleased. I never attended a Bible study, or any other church sponsored teaching other than church services, Sunday school and later Confirmation class when I was an older boy. Services were short and the organ was loud. The hymns we sung were up tempo, typical Lutheran, straight forward and easy to sing.

My parents “joined” the church in our neighborhood much like you would join a country club. There were few requirements other than you needed to believe in Jesus and be baptized sometime in your life. This meant being sprinkled with water either as an infant or an adult if you somehow missed out as a small child having water dribbled on your forehead. The Lutherans did not believe in immersion baptism; you know, like the example of Christ being baptized as an adult, in a river. (Mar 1:9) I never recall going to visit with other members in their homes or having other church members into our home, or talking with anyone before or after church. You came sat quietly without talking, got up and left, no hanging around, or potlucks; very limited socializing. The minister never came to visit us and we never visited him. As I said, at the time it seemed that the church was a building, a place to go. Attending church was an isolated event we did briefly one day of the week, and definitely not a way of life to be shared with other church members.

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Later in life I was called to be a part of the church. When I say the church I mean “*the church*”, the one founded by Jesus Christ in the first century AD. The true church is not a country club or one day a week religious experience or entertainment hour but a way of life. I discovered how different the concept, meaning and application of what the church was suppose to be compared to what typical main stream Protestant or evangelical practice has become.

Formation of the Church



The church of God, as it is called in the book of Acts (See Acts 20:28) was established on one of God's annual holy days or “feasts”; the day of Pentecost in 31 AD. The day of Pentecost, or the Feast of Weeks, is one of seven holy days which occur during the year and are enumerated by God in the book of Leviticus in chapter twenty three. They are not “Jewish festivals” but are God's holy days appointed before there existed a nation of Judah or any group of people calling themselves Jews. The holy days are carefully described in detail starting in verse two of chapter twenty three.

*Lev 23:2 "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'The **LORD'S** appointed times which you shall proclaim as holy convocations--**My appointed times** are these:'" (Emphasis added)*

God said they were his appointed times or holy days twice in the same sentence; it must be important to him.

In verses 15 & 16 of Leviticus 23 we see the holy day of Pentecost. The word Pentecost is used in the New Testament means fifty. It is to be kept as a holy day, a part of a yearly cycle. In Deuteronomy 16:9-10 it is called the Feast of Weeks because it is fifty days (seven weeks) from the day after the weekly Sabbath that falls during the Days of Unleavened Bread, another of God's holy days. It is not an accident that the Holy Spirit was given to those people God chose to form the church of God on that exact day. Christians are called the “firstfruits”, or a type of small early harvest of humans God the Father has decided to call out of this

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world before the Messiah returns to set up the kingdom of God. They are a tiny cadre of people out of the enormous confusion of religious beliefs that exist on earth. In the book of James he makes this point clear:

James 1:18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

Notice that God created a group that is small just as the first harvest in spring time in Palestine is small. Nowhere does it say it is the only group he will ever call or that they are exclusive; just first, which for his own reasons he has decided to assemble this first group. Notice also he does not refer to many groups or denominations of confusing beliefs and practices. This “one church” theme is supported elsewhere in the New Testament.

Ephesians 4:4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; vs:5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; vs:6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

Called of God



It is important to define “churchy” sounding terms since members in the church use these terms and have a full understanding of their meaning (well, sometimes). The term “called” is used by Christians to signify the point in our lives which the body of beliefs which scripture denotes as “the truth” of God (including who and what comprises his church) was first recognized. For many it was the point where they first responded to the awakening within their mind that many of the teachings previously believed true were not true. We say to one another as Christians, “When were you called?” or “How were you called?” Meaning how or when did God open your mind to the true understanding of his word.

To better explain the phrase; “the truth” which is reference in an excerpt from Paul’s letter to the church of God in the ancient city of Thessalonica:

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*2 Thessalonians 2:13 But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in **the truth**. KJV (Emphasis added)*

A lot of churchy sounding seventeenth century words that are meaningless to a first time reader but the important thing is that the truth is singled out as an object comprised of the teaching of the Messiah and the inspiration he gave to those who wrote the New Testament. Notice it is not just a truth, but *the truth*; a body of beliefs.

With regard to being “called” we read in Romans that it is an event in a Christian’s life:

*Romans 8:28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are **called** according to His purpose. vs:29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; vs:30 and these whom He predestined, **He also called**; and these whom He **called**, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. (Emphasis added)*

I now understand that I did not “join a church”, rather I was called into *the church* by God the Father based on the teaching inspired by Christ to be recorded in the book of John.

John 6:44 "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day."

The Father is shown to be the one doing the calling, and then we can come to and be a part of what the Son is doing. This is reinforced by what Jude was inspired to say:

*Jude 1 Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and **called**. (Emphasis added)*

The continuity from the words of Jesus and further explained by Paul and Jude as well as others are proof that a calling - along with a change of lifestyle & baptism - must take place before we can be considered “members” of the church, the body of Christ. (See Acts 2:38 and 1 Corinthians 12:27) For those who are children of church members the calling is not as dramatic as the calling which happens to a person that has no knowledge of the

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truth. The calling is none the less a calling by God the Father no matter how it happened, whether in a flash or over time as a person grows up in the true church of God. In either example there is a need to respond as Peter said in Acts 2:38. Personal action is required.

Acts 2:38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, (change the way you think) and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. vs:39 For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call." (clarification added)

When It All Started



In Acts 1:4 we read of a gathering together of his disciples before Jesus ascended to heaven after his resurrection. He told them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised as he said; "Which, you heard of from Me."

It is important to recognize that Christ was crucified on the Passover, one of the seven holy days of God, and he told his disciples to remain in Jerusalem, and that they were to assemble on another holy day of God; the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost. I have often wondered why people who claim to follow Christ, and call themselves Christians - followers of Christ - do not see the need to follow him in observing these annual Holy days of God as the example set by Jesus & his disciples. I am thankful that the disciples did as Christ requested, and the reward was the gift of the Holy Spirit to humanity as promised.

On that particular day God chose to place his spirit within a broader group of mankind, but not all of mankind, at least not at this time. The disciples were told to remain in Jerusalem and be "...baptized with the Holy Spirit..." The word baptized in this instance means to "to make fully wet", in other words to be immersed in the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:1 When the day of Pentecost (the same day described in Lev 23 as one of God's holy days) had come, they were all together in one place.

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vs:2 And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. vs:3 And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. vs:4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance. (clarification added)

The sequence and actions are important:

1) They assembled together on the Feast of Weeks, the day of Pentecost, one of God's annual holy days as they normally did as Jews, but were now instructed by the Messiah after his death and resurrection but before his departure from earth. Had the disciples said, *“Those are just Jewish days we don't need to observe them anymore.”* With that attitude God surely would not have given them his Holy Spirit and there would have been no church. They were obedient, why can't all Christians be like they were? Nothing has changed in the centuries that have followed. These students, disciples of Christ, kept the Holy Days, Jesus observed the Holy Days, and therefore any individual or group of believers calling themselves Christians should follow his example.

2) They were baptized with the Holy Spirit, The spirit *“...filled the whole house...”* effectively immersing them in God's Spirit on God's, not man's, Holy Day; not before or after that day but on that very day commanded in Leviticus 23.

3) Just in case someone present for this incredible event who was watching didn't get the significance of what was happening; a miracle - tongues of fire - rested on each person who had been “baptized” with the spirit.

4) They spoke real languages not their native tongues; languages which they did not normally speak and did not know, not gibberish but a recognizable spoken language of the day, understood by anyone who spoke the language. Acts 2:6 shows clearly that they were understood by

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others.

It is clear that God honored their obedience and his instructions to do what he said. This having been done he created a body of believers, the church of God. The effect of Peter receiving the spirit shows the miracle of what is referred to as “conversion”; which is to be empowered by God's spirit to do things not possible without it. Peter in his human weakness went from failing; denying Christ three times the night before Christ's crucifixion, to preaching a powerful sermon which caused many to see that they needed to change their lives. He accomplished this after he received the power of the Spirit from God. This was truly a miraculous change attributable to God; the same miraculous change which occurs in every Christian's life. It will never be as dramatic, after all this was the founding of a new spiritual body - the church of God.

Some who have been called by God have questioned their conversion, wonder if they were really called. The simple test is:

1. Did you change from your old ways, do you think differently? (This is called repentance in scriptures.)
2. Were you baptized - totally immersed in water -and did you have “hands laid on you” by a servant, a minister of Jesus Christ?
3. Do you understand the truth, and do you know why you should keep the holy days & what they mean?

If the answer is yes to all of these questions then you are living in that time of conversion from your own human ways to God's ways, you are being “converted.” It just takes time and effort.

Acts 3:19 Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,...

Once placed in the church (the body of Christ) we are there to be nurtured and continue in the life long effort of conversion as well as helping others who are doing the same thing.

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The Church; Created Then Built



This event recorded in Acts is the birth of the church of God:

*Acts 2:47 Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the **Lord added** to the church daily such as should be saved. (Emphasis added)*

The meaning of the word church as used in the New Testament is important in order to understand what is being discussed. What kind of organization or entity is being addressed when church is used in the scriptures? The word church used in the bible is a Greek word which when translated into English means “a calling out.” The church; the *ekkesia* in Greek, are those whom God called & is still calling out of the un-godly societies of this world. They are the body of believers a spiritual entity, not some structure or legal, social or human organization. This is a significant concept that has a huge impact on the understanding of who and what is the church. Many assume as I did that the church is a building, others believe it is a corporate entity or some other form of earthly organization or government, while others think it is the kingdom of God on Earth, but it is not. To assume this is contrary to the scriptures.

The scripture in Acts 2:47 says God added to the church daily: How? Did he put a few more bricks in the wall of the building; did he register with the Roman authorities and declare how much capital and wealth it had? No, he added “...*such as should be saved.*” He added people to the *akklesia* the body of called out individuals, those whom he decided to add. What we do not see in the scriptures is a membership drive, no revival meetings, and no attempt to scare people into “joining” with fiery sermons or any campaign or crusade to add people. These are human devised methods to build a constituency, a political body. We do read that God was adding members as he saw fit. As stated earlier, the church is a spiritual entity, under the control and authority of the head of the spirit world; God. Humans are selected by God the Father individually, not recruited by human means. This is an important concept for a number of reasons which will be

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discussed later.

To support the idea that the church is spiritual in nature we see later in Acts that the church was under attack. How was that done, did the Jews take away its status as a legal entity, impound the church assets, or plunder its treasury? No, it attacked the church, the members. Notice this important point:

*Acts 8:3 But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off **men and women**, he would put them in prison. (Emphasis added)*

So those who persecuted the church focused on men and women who made up the church. This has nothing to do with assets, organizational structure, legal entities, buildings or other material things, it is about people, God's people. A careful reading of the book of Acts will reveal that the church, as a body of members which included elders, apostles and others who as a group or body, made decisions on who would be deacons, where ministers would be sent to teach, what they should teach, and to whom they should teach.

It is also clear that the church is not divided into the ordained "clergy" and the non-ordained "lay" members, divisive words not found in the bible and which are political and worldly, not of God. This terminology is secular in origin and counter to God's word. The body has many members, some ordained, most are not but it is one body and elders or non-ordained are all members. A popular phrase that you will hear is: "The church has decided..." and then the decision is stated, meaning those on a corporate board (who happen to be elders or officials) has decided on some course of action. This is a gross over statement of authority, and biblically incorrect. While the scriptures clearly support a hierarchy of authority, nowhere does it state that the elders or council of elders, or the original Apostles for that matter were the "church". They are necessary members of the body, the church, but they are not the sole composition of the church. Such a statement should mean that a corporation which calls itself a "church", by legal definition within human not divine law, has made a decision but if the entire membership was not involved

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then it is clearly not a decision made by the *ekkllesia*; the called out ones; the church. Read Acts 6 to see how the true church of God functions without division. What is revealed is a hierarchy that directed the body, but not unilateral decisions made privately, rather a body that made collective decisions inclusive of all members guided by the leadership. Any organization calling itself Christian or “of God” could learn from this example.

Understanding exactly who the church of God is composed of is important for a number of reasons not the least of which is that a human organization whether it is run by a board, a council, a president, bishop or any form of human inspired organization is fallible. It can make poor decisions, wrong decisions, or even redefine doctrine contrary to scripture (which is the definition of heresy) and in so doing lead members of the true church, the body of Christ astray. It has happened many times since the church’s inception and it will happen in the future until the Messiah takes his place as King of kings on earth and banishes Satan; the source of strife, division, party spirit and false teachings. (See Galatians 5:18-21)

We see the church of God at work in Acts accomplishing many things together. They had their differences of opinion but worked them out as a group because there is strength in numbers especially when the flow of God’s spirit and the attributes of his spirit are present within the entire body. (See Galatians 5:22) Contrast this with collections of "members" forming factious groups who can't get along with or tolerate each others differences forming new “churches” and divisions. Is this of God the Father, or is it of the god of this world who wants the truth bottled up in division and strife? (See 2 Corinthians 4:3-4)

Does this mean that the body of believers is some kind of Godly super-democracy where all have the right to participate in the running of the organization? Emphatically not! The body in which Christians were called and placed by God is a spiritual body led by God & his spirit; it is not a humanly devised government with humanly inspired rules of organization or incorporation. Paul spells it out in his letter to the Corinthians:

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1 Corinthians 12:18 But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. vs:19 And if they were all one member, where would the body be? vs:20 But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. vs:21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." vs:22 No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. vs:23 And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, vs:24 but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, vs:25 that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. vs:26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. vx:27 Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. (emphasis added)

In these passages there is no differentiation or special privilege to any member or group of members. Paul was inspired to make the point that we were placed in the body of Christ, the church, by God the Father. We should have loving concern for one another, serve one another and not lord it over others. Anyone practicing such ungodly conduct is not a member of the body of Christ, and church of God. Again, so as not to be confused, God has established an order within his church. It is not a flat organization without any leadership, but those who are called to leadership have the supreme responsibility to serve the church, not rule it, as Christ demonstrated. Here is another passage in which the hierarchy is stated:

1 Corinthians 12:28 And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues.

In fact while teaching his disciples who later became apostles Jesus condemned the attitude of being a privileged class, ruling the church. These men were to become the human leadership. Here is the clear teaching of the Christ, the being whom we draw the name "Christians" from.

Matthew 20:25 But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. vs:26 Yet it shall not be so among you; but

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*whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.
vs:27 And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave-
vs:28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and
to give His life a ransom for many."*

Paul then further expands our duty to each other in 1 Corinthians 13 where he shows that love is the most important attribute of a member of the body with position or status of no consequence. It is of the utmost importance that Jesus, on the night before his death gave us the symbols of his sacrifice, the bread and wine but he also washed his disciple's feet. (See John 13:3-17) We focus on his sacrifice of his life as we should, but without significant emphasis of the powerful symbol of the foot washing and how we should treat one another in the body the other 364 days. Without that we can wash each others feet on the Passover and lord it over or spurn others the rest of the year, something the Messiah would never approve of.

The Purpose of the Church



Jesus made it plain what his followers should be doing. In the book of Luke, chapter ten we read of Jesus appointing seventy of his disciples to go ahead of him in pairs to the cities he was going to visit. Their assignment is stated in verse nine:

Luke 10:9 And heal the sick there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'

This is an interesting statement in that it covers two aspects of his earthly ministry involving healing; one physical one spiritual. His followers were to precede him with healing of disease and announce that "The kingdom of God has come near to you." Healing someone who is sick is a manifestation of his godly office & the power he was given by the Father. (See Isa 53:5) With the act of healing his disciples were to instruct the person healed that they had witnessed a preview of what the kingdom of God would be like.

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The kingdom of God is why Christ came; he is after all the king of that kingdom which is destined to rule the entire earth. (See John 18:37 & Revelation 11:15) At his return he will begin to heal the world of its physical and more importantly, the spiritual sickness of lawlessness which separates God from his children. The church is to carry that message of the kingdom of God to the world. Any group of believers professing to be Christians who are not focused on the return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of his kingdom have missed an important purpose of his mission on earth & the mission of his church. (See Mat 24:14) He is the Messiah, our Savior but he is also the King of kings & Lord of lords. (See Rev 17:14) Those roles are inseparable.

In addition to the message of the return of the Christ the church is to be busy working with those God the Father is calling.

Matthew 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, vs:20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

Members are expected to be personal examples of God & his way of life knowing that their conduct is a direct reflection on God the Father.

Matthew 5:15 Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. vs:16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

These are very important & serious responsibilities that have been entrusted to the followers of Christ, and essential reasons for why the church was created & why it exists today.

Conclusion



Based on the scriptures; God has established a spiritual organization, his church, on earth among humans, but it is a spiritual entity. Members don't join, they are called by God the Father, and once called they become a part of something far greater than the most impressive

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church or cathedral ever built, they become a part of the body of Christ.

As a member of a spiritual body we have the responsibilities to love & obey God as well as to love one another and serve one another regardless of our position within the church. This does not include lording over one another. Instead we are to be practicing Christ's kind of humility & love so that one day we may serve all of humanity. In the kingdom of God his family will be expanded beyond the firstfruits to include everyone who has ever lived.

In addition to practicing loving conduct to God & man, the church is to be busy with work which the Messiah made clear we should be engaged in doing individually & collectively.

Mark 16:15 And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.

We are to spread the word that the kingdom of God is coming to the earth, the same good news (gospel) about his kingdom Jesus and his disciples announced. Then as God the Father calls individuals into the church we need to be there to support and teach them the things Christ taught during his ministry.

Matthew 28:20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you...

This is what the true church of God is doing, just as it always has since Pentecost, 31 A.D. LT

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