

A study on the word “church”

After a person has been properly baptized (this point is discussed in one of the preceding links), he or she is a member of the New Testament “church” (this word describes the saved). Jesus promised to “build His church” (Mt. 16:18) and He fulfilled this promise by undergoing a terrible death (Acts 20:28). Jesus not only built His church as He promised, He built only *one church* (notice that in Mt. 16:18 the word “church” is singular instead of plural).

In Eph. 1:22-23 Paul described the “church” as Jesus’ “body” (“*to the church, which is his body*”). Stated another way, Paul affirmed that the words *church* and *body* are interchangeable (“church” and “body” describe the same thing). The significance of this fact is seen in Eph. 4:4, a place where Paul said God has only “one body.” Since there is only “one body” (Eph. 4:4), and this “one body is the church” (Eph. 1:22-23), there is *one church* that has God’s approval. Many other churches can be found in the world, but these churches are not part of the church built by Christ. These other churches are counterfeit groups that have been built by men (Mt. 15:8-9) and Jesus said these groups will one day be destroyed because God did not build them (Mt. 15:13).

The problem with counterfeit churches is so bad that Jesus said: “*Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out demons, and by thy name do many mighty works? 23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity*” (Mt. 7:21-23).

If we wish to truly love and serve God, we must identify and work with Jesus’ one true church instead of a counterfeit group. The Bible helps us identify which church is right through the Scriptures; we can identify the right church by using the “pattern” (2 Tim. 1:13) found in God’s word. The pattern for Christ’s church includes things like how people become Christians, how Jesus’ church worships, how the Lord’s church is organized, and what its members do.

As already explained in the preceding information, one of the identifying marks of Jesus’ church is found in how people are saved: People must believe (Heb. 11:6); repent of their sins (Lk. 13:3; Acts 17:30); acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God (Rom. 10:9), and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16). The Bible never speaks of things like “accepting Jesus into the heart,” “saying the sinner’s prayer,” or “praying to receive Christ.”

After a person follows God’s pattern for conversion as discussed in the previous paragraph, the Bible says Jesus “adds” a person to His church (Acts 2:47, KJV). In the churches built by men (counterfeit groups), people often “join” the church or they are “voted” into it. Acts 2:47 says the membership in Jesus’ church is controlled by the Lord Himself. Stated another way, people cannot “join” the New Testament church. Neither can they be voted into it. People automatically become members of it after they follow God’s pattern for conversion.