

THE IDENTITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

It seems like everyone who professes to believe in Jesus claims to be part of Jesus's church. However, these often believe and practice their faiths in different ways. This creates great confusion for both those who profess to be Christians and those who do not. Therefore, we need to break through the confusion, return to the Scriptures, and discover the true identity of those who are part of the New Testament church (Jesus's collection of saved people).

ACTS 2:37-41

When some who heard the message about Jesus believed He had risen from the dead and is both Lord and Christ/Messiah (King, vv. 22-36), they wanted to know what they must do to be saved. In response, they were commanded to repent and be baptized (immersed) for the forgiveness of their sins. About 3,000 were obedient to the gospel that day and added to the number of the saved (the church). Those who are saved have surrendered their lives to King Jesus by hearing His word (Romans 10:17), believing in Jesus (John 8:24), repenting of their sin (Acts 17:30), confessing Jesus as Lord (Romans 10:9-10), and being baptized (immersed in water, Acts 18:8). Sadly, many who profess to follow Jesus today have never obeyed this plan of salvation taught throughout the New Testament. Instead, some teach the only thing people must do is believe in Jesus (contrary to James 2:24, Matthew 7:21-23, etc.), say a sinner's prayer (not taught in Scripture), and falsely teach about baptism (e.g. baptism by sprinkling, baptism as a public declaration of faith/outward sign of an inward grace). Concerning baptism, the Bible teaches it is necessary for salvation (Mark 16:15-16; 1 Peter 3:20-21), the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16), and to be in Christ (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3-4). Only those who have obeyed the

New Testament's plan of salvation are added to Jesus's collection of saved people (His church)!

ACTS 2:42-47

Those who obeyed the gospel did not stop with their initial obedience. Instead, they continued to learn, worship, grow, and serve King Jesus. This community of Jesus-followers (the "church") was devoted to learning the will of King Jesus through the apostles (John 16:12-15; Ephesians 3:3-6). They were devoted to fellowship (sharing with God and other believers, Galatians 6:1-2; James 5:19-20). They were devoted to the breaking of bread (the Lord's Supper, Acts 20:7; Matthew 26:26-29). They were devoted to prayer (Acts 4:23-31; 12:5, 12). They were devoted to caring for needy Christians (Acts 4:32-37; 11:27-30). They were devoted to meeting for worship (1 Corinthians 14:23, 26; Hebrews 10:24-25). They were devoted to spending time with one another and sharing meals (1 Peter 4:8-9; Hebrews 3:12-13). They were also devoted to sharing the gospel (Acts 5:42; 8:4; 11:19-26). As others heard, believed, and obeyed the gospel, they were added to the number of the saved (the church)! Therefore, the New Testament church is seen as being people who have surrendered their lives to King Jesus by obeying the gospel and then continue to live a life of devotion and surrender to King Jesus by continuing to obey Him (Revelation 2:10)!

1 PETER 2:4-10

The word "church" (Greek, "ekklesia") is derived from two words, one meaning "to call" and the other meaning "out from and to." As this passage demonstrates, Jesus's church is a group of people who have been called out from the ways of darkness and into God's marvelous light! Thus, Jesus's church is a collection of people who chose to leave the ways of sin and live according to the ways of God's holiness and righteousness (Romans 6:1-23; 1 Peter 1:13-17). It is a group of people who are now devoted as a spiritual nation to God's service and the proclamation of His praises, having accessed the mercy of God!

1 JOHN 1:5-2:2

It is only through Jesus that sinners can be forgiven and have fellowship with God (who is Light). For, it is impossible for those who live in darkness to have fellowship with God. Therefore, those who claim to have fellowship with God who are living in sin are lying to themselves and others (Revelation 3:1-6, 14-22)! Those who have become Christians and turn back to sin must repent, confess their sin to God, and ask Him for forgiveness (Acts 8:22). Although Christians can and do sin at times, those who practice sin and refuse to repent are not true children of God (1 John 3:8-10). Those who are living in the light of God's holiness must then determine who they are in fellowship with only based on whether another individual is in fellowship with God (Acts 9:26-28; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15).

1 THESSALONIANS 1:1

The church is identified in various ways in Scripture. This passage demonstrates the essence, though, of what we consistently see. One element concerns where these followers of Christ were located (in the case of a local community of Jesus-followers, 1 Corinthians 1:2; Colossians 1:2). Then, the other element concerns their relationship with God and Jesus as belonging to Him (1 Corinthians 1:2; Romans 16:16). This is significant in that these people have been saved and redeemed by the blood of Jesus to be His special people who are devoted to following and serving Him (Matthew 16:18; Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 1:18-21; Titus 2:11-14).

CONCLUSION

The church of the New Testament consists of saved people who have surrendered their lives to Jesus. These have obeyed the initial requirements of the gospel and are living according to the will of King Jesus! Anyone who has never obeyed the true message of the gospel and/or is not living according to the will of King Jesus is not part of Jesus's church today.

DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS

How were people in New Testament times added to Jesus's church?

What are some common perversions of God's plan of salvation today?

What did those who obeyed the gospel do after they had become numbered among the saved?

What is required of those who are part of the church after becoming Christians?

How does the church consist of those who are "called out"?

What must Christians who sin do to be forgiven?

How should Christians decide who they are in fellowship with?

How is the church identified in the New Testament?