

## NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTIANITY (PART TWO)

### Introduction

1. There are people who have a sincere desire for the truth and who are earnestly seeking to practice New Testament Christianity. But they are confused because they see hundreds of different religious organisations that claim to be the church that Jesus promised to establish (Matthew 16:18); they see that each of these religious organisations has **its own...**
  - a. Head or guiding body located at an earthly headquarters.
  - b. Hierarchy and government.
  - c. Body of doctrine (usually contained in a creed book or manual).
  - d. Forms of worship.
  - e. Mission concepts (i.e., their own ideas of the work of the church).
2. In the previous lesson, we began by highlighting Jesus' intention to build or establish His church or religious organisation: "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock **I will build My church**, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). You will notice that the word "church" is singular, not plural. Jesus' intention was to establish **one** church or religious organisation. The fulfilment of this promise began in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost (an annual Jewish feast) in A.D. 33:
  - a. The apostles were baptised or immersed in the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-13).
  - b. The apostles preached the first gospel sermon (Acts 2:14-36).
  - c. The believers among the crowd asked what they must do (Acts 2:37).
  - d. Peter told believers to "Repent, 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"<sup>1</sup> (Acts 2:38-39).
  - e. On that day 3000 people were baptised for the remission of sins (Acts 2:41), and it is these saved ones that the Lord added to His church, and continues to do so whenever a person obeys the gospel (Acts 2:47).
3. The first congregation of believers was established and they met together each day "with one accord in the temple" (Acts 2:46); not in the actual temple but in a colonnade called "Solomon's Porch" (Acts 5:12). It was due to a great persecution that arose against the church at Jerusalem that caused the disciples to be scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1). Thus **new congregations** were established in these regions (Acts 9:31).
4. At this point we made an important distinction between establishing a new congregation and establishing a new religious organisation. The churches that were established in these regions, and throughout the world, were new congregations, **not new religious organisations**.
5. We then explained how new religious organisations came into being: (i) over a period of about 600 years, many congregations departed from the apostles' doctrine regarding the organisation, worship, and work of the church. This apostasy blossomed into what came to be the Catholic Church. (ii) The Catholic Church was dominant for several centuries until the time of The Reformation, which spawned many new religious organisations (Lutheran, Baptist, Methodist, Mormons, JWs, etc.).
6. Our aim now is to answer the following questions: **1.** How do I become a Christian? **2.** When does the Lord add me to **His church**? **3.** How can I tell the difference between a congregation that belongs to the Lord and one that belongs to a religious organisation established by man?

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<sup>1</sup> Since the whole context is in regards to salvation from sin, I believe the "gift" referred to here is salvation. In other words, salvation is the gift of the Spirit (cp. Romans 6:23).

## I. THE GREAT COMMISSION

- A. Let us begin by looking at what is commonly called “The Great Commission”. There are three clear accounts of this commission recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

“Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 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, **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” (Matthew 28:16-20 NKJV).

“Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen. And He said to them, Go into all the world and **preach the gospel** to every creature. **He who believes and is baptized will be saved**; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover” (Mark 16:14-18 NKJV).

“Then He said to them, Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that **repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name** to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:46-49 NKJV).

- B. Before the apostles could carry out this great commission, they were commanded to wait in Jerusalem to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit or “endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). This same command is related again by Luke in Acts: “And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to **wait for the Promise of the Father**, which, He said, you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but **you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit** not many days from now. Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? And He said to them, It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But **you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you**; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:4-8 NKJV).

## II. HOW DOES ONE BECOME A CHRISTIAN (A FOLLOWER OR DISCIPLE OF CHRIST)? HOW IS ONE ADDED TO THE CHURCH?

- A. It should be clear that the apostles would begin to carry out their commission when the Holy Spirit had come upon them, and then all that Jesus commanded them (as seen in the three accounts) would be carried out.
1. Indeed, we can observe all these things in Acts 2, and it is through a careful study of this chapter that we see (i) The fulfilment of Jesus’ promise regarding the baptism of the Holy Spirit, (ii) how one becomes a disciple, how one is saved, and how one receives the forgiveness of sins.
  2. Here, then, is a brief overview that highlights the fulfilment of these things and answers the questions we have regarding salvation:
    - a. The apostles were baptised or immersed in the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-13). This was in fulfilment of Jesus’ promise to the apostles before His ascension (Acts 1:4-5, 8).
    - b. The apostles preached the first gospel sermon (Acts 2:14-36). Peter preached that Jesus of Nazareth was “crucified, and put to death” (2:23) but that “this Jesus God has raised up” (2:32) and that He has been “exalted to the right hand of God” and has been made “Lord and Christ”. We see here the apostles beginning to carry out Jesus’ command to preach the gospel – the death, burial, and resurrection (cp. 1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

- c. The believers among the crowd asked what they must do (Acts 2:37). Having heard the gospel, many believed (indicated by the fact that they were “cut to the heart”) and asked what they must do. They did not assume that their belief alone (or faith only) meant they were saved or forgiven of their sins.
- d. Peter told believers to “Repent, 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” (Acts 2:38-39). This is the inspired answer to their question – each one of them *must* “repent” (a change of mind toward sin that results in a changed life) and be baptised (i.e., “to dip. Immerse, submerge for a religious purpose, to overwhelm, saturate, baptize”<sup>2</sup>) for the forgiveness of sins. On that day 3000 people were baptised for the remission of sins (Acts 2:41).

B. But what about Christ’s promise to establish His church (Matthew 16:18); was it established at this time?

1. Yes it was, and it was those who had obeyed the gospel, those who were saved, that were added to Lord’s church by the Lord Himself: “Praising God and having favor with all the people. **And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved**” (Acts 2:47).
2. Indeed, all those from that time forward that heard the gospel, believed the gospel, repented of their sins, and were baptised for the forgiveness of sins were added to **the church** by the Lord (Acts 2:47).

## Conclusion

1. A person who desires to be saved and become a member of Christ’s church can be forgiven for being somewhat confused as he faces a bewildering number of religious organisations with their own heads, headquarters, hierarchies, contradictory doctrines, forms of worship, and ways of salvation. He asks, “What must I do to be saved?” and receives contradictory answers from different religious organisations. He asks, “How do I become a member of Christ’s church?” and receives conflicting answers from different religious organisations all claiming to be Christ’s church.
2. A thoughtful person will consider this and come to realise that he is looking in the wrong place for the answers he seeks. The answers to the most important questions in life are found in the scriptures (Psalms 119:105; Proverbs 6:23). This is not to say we ought never to listen to gospel preachers. However, we ought to heed the apostle John’s words: “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but **test the spirits**, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). The only way we can “test the spirits” is by comparing what they teach against the inspired word of God. This is what the Bereans did when Paul preached to them. Luke says of them, “These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and **searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so**” (Acts 17:11).
3. This is why I suggest a study of Jesus’ promise to establish His church (Matthew 16:18), a study of the accounts of the great commission (Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 16:14-18; Luke 24:46-49), followed by a study of the first gospel sermon (Acts 2:1-47).<sup>3</sup> One can immediately see a perfect alignment between Jesus’ commission to the apostles and the beginning of its fulfilment. The answers are clear:
  - a. What must I do to be saved or become a Christian? One must hear the gospel, believe the gospel, repent of one’s sins, and be baptised for the forgiveness of sins.
  - b. How does one become a member of Christ’s church? When a person does what is necessary to be saved, the Lord Himself adds that one to **His church** (Acts 2:47).
4. Once a person has been saved and added to the church by the Lord, he is now faced with the question, “How can I tell the difference between a congregation that belongs to the Lord and one that belongs to a religious organisation established by man?” We shall answer this question in part three.

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<sup>2</sup> See The Complete Word Study Dictionary.

<sup>3</sup> I believe this can be more effective than presenting a string of proof-texts.