

# Examining the “Oneness” Position

In this the first edition of *Queries and Explications*, I will endeavor to answer six common questions raised by “Oneness Pentecostals” who deny the Godhead in three Persons.

Is it true that the name of God the Father is ‘Jesus’ according to John 5:43?

The answer is “no,” and here is why. *First*, the term, “name,” in John 5:43 does not refer to one’s proper name, like “John” or “Larry.” It refers to the Father’s authority. Jesus did not come in his own name; that is, he did not come by his own authority. Jesus did not speak by his own authority (Jn. 12:49). His doctrine was not his. It was not of his devising, but it was the doctrine which his Father gave to him to deliver (Jn. 5:30; 7:16; 8:28). In that way, he came in his Father’s name; that is, by his Father’s authority.

*Second*, see John 17. In verse six, Jesus says, “I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me...” In verse eight, he says, “For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me...” He made known the Father’s name, his power and authority, when he gave them “the words” which God had given him to speak. Further, he said, “I have given them thy word” (v. 14). Then, he said, “I have declared unto them thy name” (v. 26).

*Third*, in 1 Samuel 25:5-9, David sent some young men to Nabal and said, "Greet him in my name." Verse 9 says they "spoke to Nabal all those words in the name of David and ceased." What does that mean? It means they spoke only those words which David authorized them to speak. They did not speak of their own accord, but they spoke the words which David gave them to speak. That is how they spoke "in the name of David."

The Pentecostal might be asked if "the name" of the young men was "David." Since they came in David's "name," does that mean that their name was "David?" No, it simply means they spoke only that which David authorized them to speak.

*Fourth*, when he fought Goliath, David said, "I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts" (1 Sam. 17:45). Was David's name, "Lord of hosts"? Or, was the Lord's name, "David"? If the Pentecostals are consistent, they will have to say that God's name was "David," since David came in the name of the Lord of hosts. See the point? What did David mean when he told Goliath, "I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts?" He meant that he came by the power and authority of God.

Is it not true that the Son inherited the name of the Father according to Hebrews 1:4? If so, Christ is the Father.

*First*, if I had given one of my sons my name, Larry Ray Hafley, would that mean that my son was me? If I gave him my name, Larry Ray Hafley, would I be him? Would we be the same person? If so, he would be married to his mother, and I would be married to my daughter in law, and he would be the Father of his brother!

*Second*, the name Jesus received in Hebrews 1:4 was not the name, “Jesus.” He received the name, “Jesus,” at his birth (Lk. 1:31). However, the “name” in Hebrews 1:4 was not that kind of name. It referred to his power and authority which he received after his death on the cross (Phil. 2:9-11). Read that text carefully. After his death, and because of his death on the cross, Jesus was given a “name which is above every name.” That cannot refer to the name, “Jesus,” for he was given that name at his birth. He was given a “name,” a power, an authority, which is above every name, power, or authority. This “name,” or power, or authority was given to him after his death on the cross. “Wherefore,” because he was willing to die, God gave him “a name,” a power, an authority which is above every name, power or authority—“Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come” (Eph. 1:21; Cf. Phil. 2:9-11; Col. 1:15-19; Heb. 1:4).

*Third*, if Hebrews 1:4 teaches that “Christ is the Father,” then upon whose right hand did the Son sit when he ascended into heaven? Hebrews 1:3 says he “sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.” It would be an amazing feat for a man to sit on his own right hand! I cannot do it, but one of my sons could. As David showed in Psalm 110, two persons are involved in the concept of one sitting on the right hand of another—“The Lord (that is one person) said unto my Lord (that is another person), sit thou (one person) at my (another person) right hand.” See also Acts 7:56; Hebrews 8:1; 1 Peter 3:22.

*Fourth*, if Hebrews 1:4 teaches that “Christ is the Father,” why does verse eight say, “Unto the Son (one person) he (another person) saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of thy kingdom”?

Sounds to me like two different persons are contemplated in the text. Hence, verse four cannot be teaching that Christ is the (same person as) the Father.

*Fifth*, Hebrews 1:4 cannot be teaching that the Father and the Son are the same person, for in Hebrews 5:4, 5, the writer makes an argument which demands two separate persons. "No man," he argues, makes himself a high priest. He must be called and selected of God, "as was Aaron. So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest...." In other words, just as Aaron did not appoint himself to be a high priest, neither did Christ! However, if the Father and the Son are the same person, as Pentecostals contend, then Jesus did appoint himself. Observe the words, "So also." They are crucial. Just as Aaron was appointed by another person, "So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest...." Since he did not take this honor upon himself, since he did not glorify himself, who did?

*Sixth*, Hebrews 1:4 cannot be showing that the Father and the Son are the same person, for in Hebrews 10:5, he cites a Psalm which says, "A body hast thou prepared me." The Pentecostal should be asked to explain what "body" is referred to. Ask them, "Who is the thou in the text?" Then, ask them, "Who is the me in the text?" "Thou," one person, has prepared "a body" for "me," another person.

So, even if I could not explain Hebrews 1:4, I would know from Hebrews 5:4, 5 and 10:5 that it could not be teaching that the Father and the Son are the same person.

Is the name of the Holy Spirit 'Jesus' according to John 14:26?

*First*, go back to the argument made earlier from 1 Samuel 25:5-9. If John 14:26 “proves” that the Holy Spirit’s name is “Jesus,” then the servants of David were named “David.” Since David, as also noted earlier, came against Goliath “in the name of the Lord of hosts,” was his name “Lord of hosts”?

*Second*, just look at the text of John 14:26. “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit (a person, as ‘whom’ implies), whom the Father (another person) will send in my (another person) name, he (the person referred to as ‘the Holy Spirit,’ and ‘Comforter’) shall teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I (Jesus) have said unto you.” Simply look at the pronouns used in the text! They reveal more than one person!

A good way to begin dealing with John 14:26 with a “oneness” Pentecostal is to look at the last part of the verse first. When the text says, “he shall teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance,” ask them if they understand who is being referred to by the pronouns, “you” and “your.” Generally, they will see that “you” and “your” refers to the disciples being addressed. Once they agree to that, they have shown their ability to distinguish between persons mentioned in the text. If they can see that “you” and “your” refers to certain people, and if they can infer from those pronouns who those people are, they should have no problem being able to see the same thing with respect to the other pronouns used in the text.

Then ask them, “To whom does the pronoun “whom” refer?” To whom does the pronoun “he” refer? To whom does the pronoun “I” refer? They cannot tell you they are unable to understand to whom the pronouns refer, because they have

already identified the pronouns “you” and “your,” which shows their ability to distinguish between the various pronouns.

*Third*, in John 14:26, the Holy Spirit is called “the Comforter.” Earlier, Jesus called the Spirit “another Comforter” (Jn. 14:16). How could he be “another Comforter” if the Holy Spirit and Jesus are the same person? If they are the same person, the Spirit could not be “another.” Note, too, that “the Father” (yet another person) “he” (personal pronoun) “will give you another Comforter;” that is, one other than I, Jesus, will give you “another Comforter.”

*Fourth*, the Holy Spirit was sent in Jesus’ name; that is, by his authority. The Father gave “all authority” to the Son, Jesus (Matt. 28:18). Hence, the Spirit was sent to guide the apostles into “all truth,” speaking and revealing the things which Jesus had spoken and taught (Jn. 14:26; 16:13, 14).

*Fifth*, read John 14:21-23, the verses right above verse 26. Note the plural pronouns. For example, “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we (My Father and I) will come unto him and make our abode with him.”

If the Holy Spirit is not Jesus, is it not true that the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Jesus Christ according to Philippians 1:19?

Yes, the Spirit “is called the Spirit of Jesus Christ,” but that does not say they are the same person. In John 14:17, the Holy Spirit is called “the Spirit of truth.” Are the Holy Spirit and the truth the same thing? No, the Holy Spirit revealed the truth; he

was not the truth itself, but he revealed it (Jn. 16:13; 1 Cor. 2:12, 13). If calling the Holy Spirit “the Spirit of Jesus Christ” means that the Holy Spirit and Jesus are the same person, then calling the Holy Spirit “the Spirit of truth” would mean that the Holy Spirit and the truth are one and the same thing. If not, why not?

John the Baptist came “in the spirit and power of Elijah,” but he was not literal, physical Elijah (Lk. 1:17; Jn. 1:21). We could say that John was “the spirit of Elijah,” but that would not mean that they were the same person. Likewise, to say that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus is not to say that they are one and the same person.

How can we answer this question, ‘Is there any verse in the Bible which says that there are three separate and distinct persons in one God?’

Let me ask, “Is there any verse in the Bible which says there is only one person in the Godhead?” If the fact that no single verse says there are three separate and distinct persons in the Godhead “proves” the doctrine is not true, then the fact that there is no verse which says there is only one person in the Godhead also proves that doctrine is not true!

In response, oneness Pentecostals will usually cite John 10:30—“I and my Father are one.” The text does not say they are one person. It says they are “one,” but it does not say they are “one person.” Husband and wife are “one,” but they are not one person (Matt. 19:5). So, I might say, “I and my wife are one,” as Jesus said, “I and my Father are one.” My wife and I are no more one person than the Father and the Son are one person. Paul and Apollos were “one,” but they were not one

person (1 Cor. 3:6, 8). Genesis 11:6 says, "Behold they are one people" (NASB). Were they one person? No; they were "one," but they were not one person.

In John 17:20-22, Jesus prayed that believers might be "one." How are believers to be "one"? They are to be "one, even as we are one." If the Father and the Son are one in person, then Jesus was praying that the disciples all might be one person! Obviously, that was not his prayer. He wanted the disciples to be "one in us." The disciples were not to be one person, but "one, even as we are one." Note the plural pronouns, "us" and "we." Jesus used them to speak of himself and of his Father.

If Christ is God, but he is not God the Father, and at the same time he is not God the Holy Spirit, because they are distinct, are we not teaching that there are three Gods?

*First*, Christ is God, Deity (Titus 2:13; Heb. 1:8). The Father is God, Deity (Eph. 4:6). The Holy Spirit is God, Deity (Acts 5:3, 4).

*Second*, there is only one mankind, one humanity, "one blood." I am a man, of mankind, bearing the nature of humanity. You are a man, of mankind, bearing all the qualities and characteristics of humanity. We are two separate and distinct individual persons. Does that mean there are "two" mankind, two humanities? No, there are two persons in one mankind. There are billions of persons on the earth who are of mankind, of one nature (Acts 17:26). Though there are many separate and distinct persons, there is still only one mankind, one humanity, one human nature. Likewise, there are three separate and distinct persons who are Deity, God. There is only one Di-



vine essence or nature, one Godhood, but there are three separate and distinct persons who are God.

*Third*, "one God" does not mean "one person," anymore than "one nation" means there is only one person in the nation (2 Sam. 7:23). "One God" does not demand only "one person" anymore than "one people" demands just one person (Gen. 34:16). "One God" does not require "one person" anymore than "one tribe" requires only one person in that tribe (1 Kgs. 11:36). "One God" does not nullify more than one person anymore than "one body" negates the fact that numerous persons are parts of that one body (Eph. 4:4; 1 Cor. 12:14, 20). "One God" does not mean only "one person" anymore than "one flesh" means that husband and wife are just one person (Matt. 19:5). Many persons constitute "one nation." Many persons are contemplated when we speak of "one people." Many separate and distinct individuals make up "one tribe." Many persons are seen when we speak of "one body," the church. Two persons are "one flesh" in marriage. Thus, the fact that there is "one God" does not mean that there is only one person.

# When Was the Church Established?

QUESTION: (1) "I believe the church of Christ was founded in Jerusalem in Acts 2, but I have a problem with this, because in Acts 7:38, the Lord's church was already built in the wilderness during Moses' time. What is your biblical answer about this, sir?"

(2) "According to the Seventh Day Adventists, the church began in the garden of Eden, because the church consists of those who obey the commandments of God. Is this true also, sir?"

REPLY:

There are many theories about when the church, the kingdom of God, was established. It has been said: That the church was established before the foundation of the world; That it began in the garden of Eden; That it had its beginning in the days of Abraham; That it began during the mission of John the Baptist, and/or during the personal ministry of Jesus; That it began on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2; That it has not yet been established. How shall we respond to these varying views?

*First*, according to Daniel 2:44, the kingdom of God was not "set up" at that time; hence, it did not begin before the

foundation of the world, in the garden, nor in the days of Abraham.

*Second*, according to Matthew 3:1, 2; 4:17; 10:7; Mark 1:15; and Luke 10:9, the kingdom was still “at hand” in the days of Jesus and John the Baptist; hence, it did not commence prior to that time.

*Third*, according to Matthew 6:10, Jesus taught his disciples to pray, “Thy kingdom come,” hence, it had not “come” or arrived at that time.

*Fourth*, according to Matthew 16:18, 19, the kingdom had not yet been built, for Jesus said, “I will build my church.” John the Baptist was dead when Jesus said this; therefore, the church was not built or established during the days of John the Baptist. (If the kingdom did exist, the keys of entrance into it had not been distributed!)

*Fifth*, according to Mark 9:1, though the kingdom had not yet come, we learn that it would come during the lifetime of some of those who were then present. Since all of those men are dead, it cannot be true that the kingdom has not yet been established. So, either the kingdom (which had not come prior to this time) was set up during their lifetime, or Jesus was wrong about it, or there are some men who are 2,000 years old who are still waiting for the “kingdom of God” to “come with power”!

*Sixth*, according to Luke 19:11, ten days before Jesus was crucified, the kingdom still had not appeared.

*Seventh*, according to Luke 22:18, the kingdom of God had not “come” on the eve of Jesus’ death, for Jesus spoke of an event that would not occur “until the kingdom of God shall come.”

*Eighth*, according to Mark 15:43, the kingdom of God had not come immediately after Jesus died on the cross. If it had, why was Joseph waiting for it?

*Ninth*, according to Acts 1:6, the kingdom had not been set up forty days after the resurrection of Christ (Cf. Acts 1:3, 8; Mk. 9:1; Acts 2:1-4).

*Tenth*, according to Luke 24:49-53 and Acts 1:6-12, the kingdom had not been established at the time of the Lord’s ascension into heaven. The kingdom was to “come with power,” but the apostles had not been “clothed with power” at the time Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father (Mk. 9:1; Lk. 24:49-51; Acts 1:8-12). Thus, the kingdom was not established prior to that time.

### ***If The Kingdom, The Church, Was Established Before Acts 2:***

If, as some contend, the church was established before the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, note some things which must be true—If the church was set up before Acts 2, then:

1. The church had no head, for Christ did not become head of the body, or king of his kingdom until after his death on the cross (Eph. 1:20-23; Phil. 2:8-11; Col. 1:13, 14, 18-20).

2. The church had no apostles in it. Apostles were not “set...in the church” until after Jesus ascended into heaven (Cf. 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:8, 11). They were called to be apostles before Pentecost, but they were not set in the church until then; they were not given the keys of the kingdom until then (Matt. 16:19; Jn. 20:23; Acts 2:38).
3. The church had no Spirit in it (Jn. 7:39). The Spirit was not given until Jesus was “glorified.” He was not “glorified” as late as the night before his crucifixion, for he prayed that he might be glorified (Jn. 17:5). He did not enter “into his glory” until after his death (Lk. 24:26; 1 Tim. 3:16). According to the Spirit in the Old Testament prophets, it was “glory that should follow” the “sufferings of Christ” (Cf. Isa. 53:9-12; 1 Pet. 1:10-12). Hence, the Spirit was not given until after Jesus’ death on the cross. Therefore, if the church existed prior to his death, it existed without the Spirit! Consequently, being without the Spirit, (a) the church could not be guided into all the truth (Jn. 16:13); (b) It would have been dead, lifeless, for a body without a spirit is dead (Jas. 2:26); (c) It would have had no fellowship (1 Cor. 12:13; 2 Cor. 13:14; Phil. 2:1).
4. The church was under the limited commission (Matt. 10:5-7). As such, it could not have preached the gospel to “every creature,” but only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. This does not fit the world wide scope of the kingdom of which the prophets spoke (Isa. 2:3; Dan.7:13, 14; Lk. 24:47).

5. The church existed before Christ had “all power,” all authority (Mat. 28:18). He did not have this power until after his death on the cross (Eph. 1:20-23; Phil. 2:9-11). Christ did not have possession of the throne of David until after his resurrection from the dead (Acts 2:30-36; Cf. Lk. 1:32, 33). So, if the church existed before the resurrection of Christ, it existed without Christ having any power or authority. (On the other hand, if the kingdom has not yet been established, then we have Christ sitting on a throne with all power, but without a kingdom over which to rule!)
6. The church was filled with unredeemed members (Heb. 9:15-17). None are redeemed except by the blood of Christ; so, if the church existed before Christ died, it was filled with unredeemed souls!
7. The church was not allowed to preach Jesus as the Christ (Matt. 16:20). That being so, it preached a gospel that differed from the gospel Paul preached (Acts 9:20; 17:2, 3). Hence, those who preached it were to be “accursed” (Gal. 1:8, 9). Imagine a church in existence whose members are “accursed” when they preach!
8. The church existed without having been purchased by the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28). Its members had not been “bought” by the blood (1 Cor. 6:20; 2 Pet. 2:1).
9. Disciples, members of the church, had no cross in which to glory (Gal. 6:14).
10. Members of the church did not believe in the resurrection of Christ (Matt. 16:22; Lk. 24:11). As such, they did not believe the gospel, nor could they preach it (1 Cor. 15:1-4).

11. Christ was not the High Priest, therefore, members of the church could not approach the Father through him (Heb. 7:11-8:4; 10:10-14).
12. The church was under the Old Testament, hence, not under law to Christ (Eph. 2:14, 15; Col. 2:14-16). That being so, it was not under the New Testament (Heb. 9:16, 17). Hence, if it existed before Acts 2, it could not have been the "New Testament church." Too, if under the law of Moses, the church was "in bondage," and not "free."
13. The blood of Christ was not in it (Heb. 9:22, 23; 10:1-4, 10-14). (Imagine the body of Christ without the blood of Christ—Eph. 1:7; 2:13, 16; 5:25, 26)!
14. The church did not have a foundation, a tried stone, a chief corner stone (Isa. 28:16). The sure foundation was rejected. The chief cornerstone could not be set or laid in the foundation until it had been rejected. Jesus was rejected when he was crucified (Isa. 53:3-7; Mk. 8:31; Acts 4:10,11; 1 Pet. 2:6-8). If the church existed before the death of Jesus, it existed without a "chief corner stone" and without "a sure foundation."
15. No one knew it! The Pharisees did not know the kingdom was already existent (Lk. 17:20). The Lord did not know it (Lk. 22:18). The thief on the cross did not know it (Lk. 23:42). "Jesus' disciple," Joseph, did not know it (Matt. 27:57-60; Lk. 23:51). The apostles did not know it (Acts 1:6). How can men today claim that the kingdom was set up during the personal ministry of Christ when no one back then knew anything about it?!

## **Pertinent Points Pointing To Pentecost**

Observe certain and certified facts which point to the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 as the time when the kingdom, the church, was established.

*PERIOD:* “In the last days,” the kingdom of God was to be established (Isa. 2:2). The prophet, Joel, and the apostle Peter, speaking “as the Spirit gave (him) utterance,” said that Acts 2 was the right time, i.e., “the last days” (Acts 2:4, 16, 17; Cf. Heb. 1:1, 2). All the prophets, Peter said, spoke of “these days,” which were “the last days” (Acts 3:24). Therefore, Acts 2 was the right period of time for the kingdom to come. Peter later referred to it as “the beginning” (Acts 11:15). The “beginning” of what? Let those who say the kingdom was not established in Acts 2 answer that question.

*PLACE:* “Jerusalem” was the city where the church, the kingdom, was to be established (Isa. 2:3; Lk. 24:47, 49; Acts 1:4, 5; 2:5). The Holy Spirit fell upon the apostles “at the beginning” “in Jerusalem” (Acts 1:4, 5; 2:5; 11:15, 16). “Beginning at Jerusalem” said the Lord, said the prophet Isaiah, said the Holy Spirit (Isa. 2:3; Lk. 24:47, 49; Acts 2:5). “Where” do you say the kingdom began? Where did the church of which you are a member have its beginning?

*PERSONS:* “All nations shall flow unto it” (Isa. 2:2; Lk. 24:47). This kingdom, therefore, was not the one God made when the children of Israel came out of Egypt (Ex. 19:6; Deut. 7:6). That covenant and kingdom was not made for all nations, but the kingdom of God, the church, God’s “holy nation,” includes “every creature,” “all nations,” both Jews and Gentiles (Ex. 31:17; Eph. 2:11, 12; Mk. 16:15; Lk. 24:47; Eph. 2:11-22; 3:6;



1 Pet. 2:5-9). Acts 2 marks the beginning—“devout men out of every nation” (Cf. Acts 2:5, 9-11, 21, 39; 10:2, 34, 35; 13:26).

*POWER:* “Power” was to be given to the apostles when the Spirit came (Lk. 24:49; Acts 1:1-8). The kingdom of God was to “come with power” (Mk. 9:1). So, when the Spirit came, the power came, and the kingdom came. This occurred in Acts 2. Observe the logical progression: When one admits that the Spirit came upon the apostles, he admits that they received power (Acts 1:5, 8; 2:4). When one admits that power was given, then he admits the kingdom came, for it came “with power” (Mk. 9:1). The conclusion is inescapable. To deny it is to deny the testimony of Scripture, and that it is infidelity.

*PROMISE:* “Promise” was made—“the promise of the Father” was what the apostles had heard of Jesus (Acts 1:4). What promise? When had they heard it? They had heard it in John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13. They had “heard” it in Luke 24:49. Jesus promised them power when the Spirit came upon them (Acts 1:8). It was the promise of the Spirit. That promise was fulfilled in Acts 2:4 when the Spirit came (Cf. 2:33b.).

Another “promise” had been made—“I will build my church” (Matt. 16:18). The promise made was the promise met. The Spirit came. The power came. The kingdom came. In this way, in Acts 2, “the promise of the Holy Spirit,” with all its implications and ramifications, was fulfilled.

*PROCLAMATION:* “Proclamation” is another way of speaking of the divine declaration of “the word of the Lord” which was to go forth from Jerusalem; that is, “beginning at Jerusalem” (Isa. 2:3; Lk. 24:47). Yes, Luke and Isaiah speak of the same thing. How do I know? Look at Luke 24:46—“Thus it

is written." Where? Where was "it written"? Isaiah 2 is where "it is written" that the word of the Lord was to emanate or go forth from Jerusalem. And when did those promises converge and emerge, and when were they fulfilled? "At Jerusalem" in Acts 2 (Acts 2:5; Cf. Lk. 24:47; Acts 2:38). The word for all nations, i.e., repentance and remissions of sins in the name of Jesus Christ, began in Acts 2, just as Jesus and Isaiah said it would!

*POTENTATE*: "Potentate," or "the King of kings, and Lord of lords," is Jesus the Christ (1 Tim. 6:15). Jesus refused earthly kingship and denied that his kingdom was of this world; that is, he denied that it was a civil, worldly, political, military kingdom (Jn. 6:15; 18:36; 1 Pet. 2:5-9).

At the announcement of his birth, Jesus did not yet have his power, his kingship, "the throne of his father David," for the angel said the Lord God "shall give" it unto him; hence, the throne was not yet given unto him (Lk. 1:32). His throne was not given unto him as late as Matthew 23:2, 3, near the end of his life on earth, for he yet recognized the authority of the law of Moses.

It was in Acts 2, for the very first time, that Jesus was proclaimed as Lord and Christ, both Ruler and Redeemer (2:30-36). Jesus was not to rule as Lord until seated at the right hand of the Father (Psa. 110:1). He was not seated at the right hand of God until after his death and until after his ascension (Heb. 1:3; 1 Pet. 3:22). The initial announcement and official pronouncement of his exaltation, glorification, and coronation at the right hand of God was not made known until Acts 2:33-35. Thus, he became our "Potentate" on Pentecost in Acts 2.

## **But What About “The Church In The Wilderness”?**

The word, “church,” may refer to any kind of assembly, whether sacred or secular. We read of an “assembly” (or church) in Acts 19:39, 41. Obviously, that “church” or assembly was not a gathering or congregation of the Lord’s people. Yet, it is the same word which is translated “church” in Matthew 16:18 and Acts 7:38. When Luke spoke of the “church” in the wilderness, he was speaking, not of the New Testament church, or body of Christ, but of the congregation or assembly, the aggregate, corporate group of those who had been brought out of Egypt under Moses (Acts 7:36-38).

“The Church of Christ did not exist, in fact, before the day of Pentecost. The people of God during the Old Testament dispensation were in the kingdom of God as established at Mount Horeb by the Old Covenant, and there was an Old Testament congregation, a Church of Yahweh; but the Church of Christ came into being first with the establishment of the New Covenant and the gift of the Holy Spirit by the enthroned Messiah” (Charles Augustus Briggs, *General Introduction To The Study Of Holy Scripture*, footnote, No. 1, p. 36).

Spiritually, we may think of the church as the Lord’s army (2 Cor. 10:3-5; Eph. 6:10-17; 2 Tim. 2:3, 4). Yet, when I read of the physical, material, and military army of the Lord in the Old Testament, do I think they are the same thing (Cf. Deut. 24:5; 1 Chron. 12:22; 2 Chron. 26:11-13)? No (Jn. 18:36; 2 Cor. 10:3, 4). As one can distinguish between the physical and spiritual army and armor of the Lord, so he ought to be able to separate the physical assembly in the wilderness from the

“general assembly and church of the firstborn which are written in heaven.”

## **Those Who Obey Commands Are The Church?**

While it is certain that the disobedient do not constitute the church of God, it is not true, as we have shown, that the church of the New Testament has been in existence since the garden of Eden (Rom. 2:8, 9; 2 Thess. 1:8). It is equally certain that only the obedient comprise the church of the Lord “in the last days” (Jn. 3:21, 36; 14:15, 21-23; Rom. 1:5; 6:17, 18; 10:16; 16:26; Rev. 21:27; 22:14). Not every obedient person in every age has been a member of the New Testament church. (a) Abel was obedient, but the blood of Christ speaketh better things than the blood of that righteous man (Heb. 11:3; 12:24, 28). Abel did not receive the kingdom which we have received (Heb. 12:23, 28).

(b) The rich, young ruler had kept the commandments of the Lord from his youth (Mk. 10:20). Yet, he was not in the Lord’s kingdom (Mk. 10:23-25). Though he kept the commandments of the law of Moses, he was not fit for the kingdom of God. Thus, the fact that some have kept God’s commandments all through the ages does not mean that the church has existed all that time.

(c) Abraham and Noah obeyed God; they kept his commandments (Gen. 6:22; 7:1; 22:18; Heb. 11:7, 8). However, they were not members of the church, the kingdom which we have received (Heb. 11:13; 12: 23, 28). Therefore, they do greatly err who say the church has existed whenever and wherever men have been obedient to God’s commands.

Jesus promised to build his church (Matt. 16:18). He spoke of the kingdom being “at hand” (Matt. 4:17). It did not begin before Acts 2. Beginning in Acts 2, we read of “the church” and of those who were in the kingdom (Acts 2:47; 5:11; 8:1, 3, 12; Col. 1:13; Rev. 1:9). Are you in it? Have you been born again in obedience to the truth (Jn. 3:3, 5; 1 Cor. 12:13; 1 Pet. 1:22-25)?

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