

Introduction

- There are some words in our English language that we have a difficult time understanding—we have an image in our minds, and as soon as we hear that word, we instantly think of that image.
 - For instance, “**angel**.”
 - ▶ We almost instantly think of one of those heavenly spirits (Heb. 1:14).
 - ▶ In reality, however, the Greek word ἄγγελος means simply, “**messenger**,” whether human or otherwise.
 - How about the word “**faith**.”
 - ▶ The concept of “faith” has come to be known as almost some mystical power like the *Prana* of the Hindus, or Baron Carl von Reichenbach’s (1788–1869) *Odic Force*.
 - ▶ But πίστις (“faith”) is simply the *noun* form of the verb πιστεύω (“believe”)—thus, “*faith*” is simply “**belief**.”
 - There is another word with which we have this same problem: “**church**.”
 - ▶ We have created so many different meanings for the word “**church**,” and it keeps evolving over time.
 - “Did you *go to church* while you were away?” or “Get ready, it’s almost *time for church!*”
 - “*There is a church sitting* atop nearly every place to which tradition assigns Biblical significance.”
 - “Terrorists are *blowing up churches* all over the Middle East.”
 - “Something funny happened right *after church ended*.” [The church will never end (Dan. 2:44) 🤔.]
 - ▶ Because of this, it is difficult for us to really comprehend what “the church” actually is.
- But what were the NT writers talking about when they referred to “the church”?

The Church: God’s Eternal Plan

- I. N.B. Hardeman once debated on *The Establishment of the Kingdom of God*, in which he stated that the **church has always existed**:
 - A. In **Purpose** (Eph. 3:1-14)
 - B. In **Promise** (Gen. 12:3; et al.)
 - C. In **Prophecy** (Isa. 2:2,3; Dan. 2:44; et al.)
 - D. In **Preparation** (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 28:19; Acts 1:4-8)
 - E. In **Perfection** (Acts 2:1-4; 4:32-37; 8:4; et al.)

There was/is Only One Church

- I. According to the NT, there is only **one church**—any other “church” is not recognized by the Lord (cf. Matt. 7:21-23).
 - A. **MATT. 16:18**—“...upon this rock I will build **MY church**...”
 - B. **ROM. 12:4**—“...we have many members in **ONE body**...”
 - C. **ROM. 12:5**—“...we are all **ONE body** in Christ...”
 - D. **1 COR. 10:17**—“...we who are many are **ONE body**...”
 - E. **1 COR. 12:12,13**
 - 1. “...this body is **ONE**...”
 - 2. “...the members of **THE body**, though many, are **ONE body**...”
 - 3. “...baptized into **ONE body**...”
 - 4. “...many are **ONE body**...”
 - F. **EPH. 2:16**—“...reconcile us both to God in **ONE body** through the cross...”

- G. EPH. 4:4—“...There is **ONE** body and one Spirit...”
- H. COL. 3:15—“...you were called in **ONE** body...”
- II. Thus, Jesus talked about **one church**; Paul talked about **one church**; Peter talked about **one church**, etc.
 - A. But man (or Satan) has an amazing ability to create confusion and perversion in even the simplest of things.
 - B. Thus, the question today is commonly, “*Of how many ‘churches’ does ‘the church’ consist?*”
 - 1. Men who have their own ideas about what the church ought to be have created their own terminology and their own way of reconciling the fact that we have so many “churches” today, and yet the NT speaks of only one.
 - a) They have ingeniously done so as follows: “The church” consists of **all** the diverse and various “churches” who would check the “Yes” box if asked, “Is this church a *Christian* church?”.
 - b) Others may claim that it’s referring to the Catholic Church, which history shows quite plainly isn’t the case.
- III. So what were the NT writers really referring to when they wrote of and spoke of this kingdom called “*the church*”?
 - A. If there is only **one** church;
 - B. And if there are **2,000+** churches in this country alone;
 - C. How do I know *which* church is **THE** church?
- IV. In accordance with sound, objective logic, the existence of these two facts leaves only two possibilities:
 - A. Either **ONE** of these 2000+ churches is **THE** church;
 - B. Or **NONE** of these 2000+ churches is the church.
 - 1. So, is the NT church identifiable today?

Identifying the New Testament Church that Jesus Built

- I. If there is anything that can be identified, then the NT church can be—for the same reasons, and **by the same process**.
 - A. THE LAW OF EXCLUDED MIDDLE—“*Everything is either some thing, or it is not that thing.*”
 - 1. For instance, everything on this planet is either **human**, or it is **nonhuman** (there is *no middle/third option*).
 - 2. A hairy, four-legged creature darts across the street: that creature is either a **fox**, or **not** a fox.
 - 3. Thus, if one has sufficient info concerning a particular thing, then, by process of identification, one can successfully determine the identity of a thing by simple comparison/contrast (see chart).
- II. MAMMALS
 - A. This simple process can be used to identify *any* creature as either a **mammal**, or **something other than a mammal**.

PROCESS OF IDENTIFICATION

BASIC TRAITS OF MAMMAL →	WARM-BLOODED	LIVE BIRTH	NURSES YOUNG
SNAKE?	✗	✗	✗
BIRD?	✓	✗	✗
DOG?	✓	✓	✓

- ➡ A snake fits none of the basic traits of mammals, and is thus obviously something *other* than a mammal.
- ➡ Likewise, while a bird has *some* common traits, it does not fit *all*, and is thus something other than a mammal.
- ➡ However, a dog meets all the required criteria, **having all the traits of a mammal**, and is thus a **mammal**.
 - Thus, **we have successfully identified a dog as a mammal**.

- III. CHURCHES
 - A. The same process can be used to identify *any* church as either **THE church**, or **something other than the church**.

	NT CHURCH	CHURCH A	CHURCH B	CHURCH C	CHURCH D
PLAN OF SALVATION	Hear, Believe, Repent, Confess, Be Immersed	God Pre-Elects/ Predetermines	Believe in Jesus, Receive Holy Spirit	Acknowledge Sin, Believe & Ask Jesus Into Heart	Hear, Believe, Repent, Confess, Be Immersed
PATTERN OF WORSHIP	A Cappella Singing, Study, Prayer, Giving, Lord's Supper every First Day of Week	Choir/Panik; Prayer, Giving, Semor, L.S. Once/Year	"Praise Band," Prayer, Talk, L.S. Once/Month	"Praise Band," Prayer, Talk, Giving, L.S. Once/Quarter	A Cappella Singing, Study, Prayer, Giving, Lord's Supper every First Day of Week
ORGANIZ. & GOVT	Jesus Only Head; Pre-Qualified Male Elders/ Deacons (if avail.)	Earthly Head; Single Male "Bishop" over Entire District	Earthly/HQ/Heads; Single Male "Pastor"; Male "Elders"/ Deacons	Earthly HQ/Heads; Single Female "Pastor"; Male/ Female Deacons	Jesus Only Head; Pre-Qualified Male Elders/ Deacons (if avail.)
CRIED(S)	The New Testament of Jesus Christ	Unalterable Trad. Constitution	Some OT; Some NT; Heart's Desire	Some OT; Some NT; Heart's Desire	The New Testament of Jesus Christ
NAME	None but Christ	___ist Church	___st Church	___ist Church	None but Christ
BAPTISM	For Remission of Sins	To Join Church	Just Believer	To Join Church	For Remission of Sins
KINGDOM	Is Here / Is = Church	Not Here	Not Here	Not Here	Is Here / Is = Church
APOSTASY	Very Possible	Impossible	Impossible	Impossible	Very Possible

- B. If a church fails to match **THE church** we read about in the NT—in any capacity—then that church is **something other than THE church** that Jesus *promised with His word* (Matt. 16:18) and *purchased with His blood* (Acts 20:28).
- C. Such a church is neither "*of Christ*" (Rom. 16:16) nor "*in Christ*" (Gal. 1:22; 1 Thess. 2:14).
 - 1. Therefore, **no** member of *that* church is "*in Christ*" (Gal. 3:26,27; Eph. 2:13; Php. 1:1; 4:21; Col. 1:2).
- D. Moreover, only those *in Christ* have the hope of eternal life (Rom. 3:24; 6:23b; 8:1; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 5:17; 2 Tim. 1:1).
 - 1. Thus, **ANY member of ANY church that is not HIS church does NOT have the hope of eternal life** (1 Jn. 5:12)!
- E. Since this is undeniably the case, every human soul needs to apply 2 Cor. 13:5 not only to *himself*, but to his **church!**
 - 1. "**Test your [church], to see whether [it is] in the faith!**"
- F. **Put your church to the test**—see if it matches the *teachings, practices, organization, etc.* of *Christ's church*.
 - 1. And, if it does not, **GET OUT** of *that church*, and **GET IN** *Christ's church!*
 - 2. For, just as only those who are in Christ are raised to walk with Him in newness of life on earth (Rom. 6:3-5), only those who are in Christ will be raised to live with Him in their new life in heaven (1 Thess. 4:13-18; 2 Th. 1:7-9)!

Conclusion

- ➔ So, **what is "the church"?** —The church is the universal assembly of all those who:
 - "**have put on Christ**" (Gal. 3:27) by having "**purified [their] souls in obedience to the truth**" (1 Pet. 1:22);
 - "**continue stedfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship...**" (Acts 2:42);
 - "**walks...after the tradition which they received from [them]**" (2 Thess. 3:6);
 - do **not "go beyond what is written"** (1 Cor. 4:6), but who "**abides in the teaching of Jesus Christ**" (2 Jn. 9).
- ➔ The church is the antitype of the Holy Place—and only those in the *Holy Place* may enter the *Holy of Holies (heaven)*!
 - **Make sure you are in the one and only Holy Place**—God has warned you that **everyone else** will "**miss the bus!**"

Everyone who **goes too far** and **does not remain in the teaching of Christ** **does not have God.**

The one who **remains in the teaching**—**THIS** person has both the **Father and the Son.**