

II. THE ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE CHURCH

A. WHEN DID THE N.T. CHURCH BEGIN?

1. Since Christ referred to the building of His church in a futuristic sense it is evident that the church had not begun at that time and is not in gospel accounts (Matt. 16:18). The principles used for church discipline are cited in Matt. 18:15- 17 by this reference is to the Jewish assembly.
2. It is also evident from the nature and means of formation that the church could not have been formed before Christ was exalted (Eph. 1:19-23; I Cor. 12:13). The church is a spiritual body that is being formed by the Holy Spirit who was not sent to do this work until Christ had ascended.
3. It follows then that the church had to begin sometime between the exaltation of Christ and the use of the word "church" in regard to a certain group of believers (Acts 2:47).
4. The Scriptures indicate that the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit (placing believers into a spiritual body) began ten days after Christ's ascension (Acts 1:4,5). Peter said later that "the beginning" or first occurrence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit was on the day of Pentecost (Acts 11:15,16).

B. WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THE WORD CHURCH AND TO WHOM DOES IT REFER?

The word "church" (ekklesia) means a "called out assembly" and may refer to various assemblies mentioned in the Scriptures.

- a. It is used to refer to Israel (Acts 7:38; Heb. 2:12). For this reason some have mistakenly formulated a theology contending that Israel and the N.T. church are two groups of the same body.
- b. The word "church" is used of those who comprised an unlawful assembly or mob in Ephesus against the apostle Paul (Acts 19:32,39,41).
- c. The word "church" is used primarily to refer to those individuals who professed faith in Christ and became a part of a local assembly of believers (Acts 2:47).

C. WHAT DO THE SCRIPTURES TEACH CONCERNING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF N.T. CHURCHES

1. Local assemblies or churches were established and met in an individual's house (Rom. 16:5; I Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Philemon 2). Much confusion has arisen from viewing the church as a building rather than a body of believers. Note I Cor. 11:20-22,24.
2. The Scriptures teach that the N.T. church is a people being called out for Christ during the dispensation of grace (Acts 15:14). They are those whom Christ purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28) and they also make up the bride of Christ which He loves and will one day present to Himself (Eph. 5:25-29).
3. The Bible teaches also that the N.T. church is the means through which Christ is conducting His work of saving others and using others in this world for His glory (Acts 1:8; 13:2-5; Eph. 4:12)