

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. - 1 Peter 2:2

THE SINCERE MILK OF GOD'S WORD

The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword... - Hebrews 4:12

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The Head of the Church

When the word "church" is found in the New Testament, it almost always comes from the Greek word *ekklesia* (in the KJV, **Acts 19:37** is the only time the word "church" is translated from another word).

When *ekklesia* is used, it may be translated "assembly" (**Acts 19:32,39,41**).

However, the vast majority of the time it is used in the New Testament, the word is translated "church," and refers specifically to a "called out" assembly of people who are in Christ.

The word "church" is one term among several that describes the collective body of those who are in Christ.

In **Colossians 1:13**, the church is called "*the kingdom of [God's] dear Son*." In **1 Timothy 3:15**, the church is called "*the house of God*." In **Ephesians 2:21**, the church is called "*an holy temple in the Lord*." In **Ephesians 1:23**, the church is referred to as Christ's "*body*."

Though several terms are used to describe the church, they are not "denominations" of the Lord's body. Rather, multiple terms are used to describe the *same* body.

Just as Jesus may be called "Lord," "Savior," "Christ," "King," "Redeemer," "Prophet," "High Priest," etc., "the church" may be called "church of Christ," "church of God," "kingdom of Christ," "family of God," "temple of the Lord," "body of Christ," etc.

The first part of **Ephesians 4:4** makes it clear that these terms all refer to just one church, as it states, "*There is one body*."

Having said this, there are times in Scripture that the word "*churches*" is used in the plural form (cf. **Rom. 16:16; Gal. 1:2**).

The reason for this is that while the church is sometimes referred to in the "universal" sense (all Christians throughout the world), it is at other times referred to in the "local" sense (Christians meeting at a particular location to carry out the work of the church). The distinction between different "*churches*" in the New Testament is not what doctrine they are to follow or who their source of authority is. Rather, churches are distinguished from one another by location.

Paul wrote to saints "*in Rome*" (**Rom. 1:7**), "*at Corinth*" (**1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1**), "*at Ephesus*" (**Eph. 1:1**), "*at Philippi*" (**Phil. 1:1**), and "*at Colosse*" (**Col. 1:2**). He referenced one church that was "*of the Thessalonians*" (**1 Thes. 1:1; 2 Thes. 1:1**), but this again identified their location. Doctrinally, this church was "*in God the father and in the Lord Jesus Christ*" (**1 Thes. 1:1; cf. 2 Thes. 1:1**).

This was true of all local churches in the New Testament. None were identified as belonging to a fallible man. Rather, each one belonged to God and Christ (**1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:2**).

The church belongs to Christ because he is the builder, foundation, and head of the church. Note that in **Matthew 16:18**, Jesus stated that He would build His church.

The Holy Spirit explained Jesus' relation to the church in **Colossians 1:18**: *And He is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the preeminence.*

In **Ephesians 1:22-23**, the Holy Spirit said that God *“hath put all things under [Christ’s] feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.”*

As the head of the church, Christ must be looked to as the source of authority for all church practices.

God demonstrated the need to heed Jesus’ authority when Jesus was transfigured before Peter, James, and John. At that time, God said, *“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him”* (**Matt. 17:5**).

Following Jesus’ death and resurrection, Jesus said, *“All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth”* (**Matt. 28:18**).

The message is clear. God, the original source of all authority, has delegated religious authority to Christ. In order for a practice of the church to be acceptable, then, the authority for it must come from Christ rather than from men.

A question that naturally results from this is how we know if something is authorized by Christ.

Before He ascended into heaven, Christ assigned His apostles the work of teaching *“all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you:”* (**Matt. 28:19-20**). The apostles carried out this command as they taught the world Christ’s doctrine. They were inspired by the Holy Spirit as they taught, and their doctrine was confirmed through the miracles God allowed them to perform (**Mark 16:20**).

This is why the early church is described as continuing *“steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine”* (**Acts 2:42**). The *apostles’* doctrine is *Christ’s* doctrine (cf. **Gal. 1:11-12**).

Since the written word is now complete, it is no longer necessary to have men doing what the apostles did in the first century. Rather, we must look to the doctrine Christ and His apostles taught that is revealed in the New Testament.

All of this ties in with Christ’s role as the head of the church. Only local churches that follow the teachings of the New Testament are acting by authority of Christ.

If all those claiming to follow Christ would take this to heart, much division could be eliminated.

Instead of building “church gymnasiums” for fun and entertainment, churches would be focused on being the *“pillar and ground of the truth”* (**1 Tim. 3:15**).

Instead of appointing councils of men to oversee multiple churches and establish doctrine, churches would follow the New Testament pattern of appointing elders in *each* local church who oversee that church’s work and follow *Christ’s* doctrine (**Acts 14:23; 1 Pet. 5:2**).

Instead of worshipping God with mechanical instruments to sound better to men, churches would simply sing and make melody in the heart in order to please God (**Eph. 5:19**).

These problems are among the many that would be “solved” if we would respect Christ’s authority.

Just as we must obey Christ’s teachings as individuals, so must churches do when acting as a “unit.”

May we heed the inspired words of **2 John 9**: *Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.*

-Michael Hickox