

We find other differences in teaching and practice. Many churches teach that obedience to God's law is unnecessary, that Christ kept it for us or it was "nailed to the cross" with Christ. This is directly contrary to Jesus' own words (Matthew 4:4; 5:17-19) and the teaching and practice of the apostles (Acts 24:14; 25:8; Romans 7:12, 22; 1 Corinthians 7:19; 2 Timothy 3:15-17).

Following Christ's example, the apostles powerfully preached about Jesus Christ's return to establish the coming Kingdom of God (Luke 4:43; 8:1; 21:27, 31; Acts 1:3; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 28:23, 31). But Paul warned that, even in his day some were already preaching "a different gospel" (2 Corinthians 11:4; Galatians 1:6).

We see much confusion in churches about what the gospel is. Most view it as a message about Christ's birth, life and death without really understanding why He came and why He had to die and without proclaiming the message of God's Kingdom that Christ Himself taught (Mark 1:14-15).

Similarly Jesus and the apostles did not teach that the righteous ascend to heaven at death (John 3:13; Acts 2:29, 34), and they understood that man does not possess an immortal soul (Ezekiel 18:4, 20; Matthew 10:28) that would spend eternity in either heaven or hell.

Nowhere do we find popular religious holidays such as Christmas approved in the Bible. The only time Easter is mentioned in the Bible (Acts 12:4, King James Version), it is a blatant mistranslation of the Greek word for Passover. Lent and its practices are nowhere found.

These are some of the major differences between the Christianity of the time of Christ and the apostles and that commonly practiced today. Shouldn't you look into your Bible to see if your beliefs and practices square with what Jesus Christ and the apostles practiced and taught?

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What Did the Early Church Believe and Practice?

The book of Acts is an eyewitness account of the early Church from Christ's death until about A.D. 60. Chapter 2 records the beginning of the Church, when God sent His Spirit to 120 followers of Jesus Christ.

Many Bible readers are familiar with the miraculous events of that day—of the house in which they met filling with the sound of a mighty wind and what appeared to be tongues of fire alighting on those gathered there. Another miracle occurred as those people, now filled with God's Spirit, began to speak in the languages of people from many lands so that all could understand their words.

Often overlooked in this account is the day on which these events occurred, the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1), one of the festivals God commanded for His people many centuries before (Leviticus 23). In revealing these festivals, God said that "these are My feasts ... the feasts of the LORD, holy convocations..." (verses 2, 4). God proclaimed that these festivals were to be "a statute forever throughout your generations" (verses 14, 21, 31, 41).

The Gospels show that Jesus Christ kept the same festivals (Matthew 26:17-19; John 7:10-14, 37-38). Both the book of Acts and Paul's letters show the apostles keeping these festivals during the decades after Christ's crucifixion (Acts 2:1-4; 18:21; 20:6, 16; 27:9).

Most churches teach that the festivals were "nailed to the cross," that they were somehow annulled by Christ's death. Yet the unmistakable record of the Bible is that the early Church continued to observe them, but with greater grasp of their spiritual significance.

Speaking of one of these God-given feasts, the apostle Paul urged the church in Corinth—a mixed group of gentile and Jewish believers—to "keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:8). Paul clearly was referring to the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:6; Deuteronomy 16:16).

Paul explained the significance of the Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7; Leviticus 23:5) and gave instructions on how to properly observe this ceremony (1 Corinthians 11:23-28).

The many references in the Gospels, Acts and Paul's epistles prompt an obvious question: Since Jesus, the apostles and the early Church kept these days, why don't churches teach and observe them today? After all, Paul directly tied the feasts to Jesus, His purpose and His sacrifice for mankind (1 Corinthians 5:7).

The Gospels and the book of Acts are equally clear that Christ, the disciples and the early Church kept the weekly Sabbath—from Friday evening to Saturday evening, the seventh day of the week—as their day of rest and worship (Mark 6:2; Luke 4:16, 31-32; 13:10; Acts 13:14-44; 18:4). Jesus even called Himself "Lord of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:28).

It was Jesus' custom to go to the synagogue every Sabbath to worship (Luke 4:16). Contrary to the teaching of those who say that Paul abandoned the Sabbath, it was his custom, too, to go to the synagogue every Sabbath (Acts 17:1-3), using the opportunity to teach others about Jesus Christ.

The weekly Sabbath is another of God's festivals, like those mentioned earlier. It is, in fact, the first of His feasts listed (Leviticus 23:1-4). It is included in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15).

As with God's other feasts, the Sabbath is ignored by the overwhelming majority of churches. Rather than keeping the Sabbath as God commanded, most churches meet on the first day of the week—Sunday—a day nowhere commanded in the Bible as a day of worship. Why? If we are to observe any day as a weekly day of rest and worship, shouldn't it be the same day Jesus Christ and the apostles kept?

where approval is due. He criticizes the unrepentant for faults that threaten their relationship with Him.

The Church, when the messages were written, was suffering trials, persecution and imprisonment. Antipas, a local resident and martyr, had already been killed. Christ encourages the congregations not to lose heart, not to quit, not to compromise their beliefs, and—if necessary—to be willing die for His sake. He reminds them to look ahead to the era of the Kingdom of God, when they will help Him rule the world in righteousness.

Jesus compliments the devoted members for their service, labor, patience, perseverance, endurance and faith. However, His criticisms and some of His other compliments are revealing. They show that the threat from within the Church was—and always will be—cause for concern.

Many members of these congregations had remained faithful in spite of many hardships and trials. But others had lost their first love. Some are lukewarm and spiritually blind—badly needing salve for their eyes so they can see their deteriorating spiritual condition. Christ warns them: "... I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works" (Revelation 2:23).

Besides the growing problem of spiritually weak members, false prophets were infiltrating the congregations. Doctrinal errors were developing. The doctrine of Balaam, the teachings of the Nicolaitans and the beguiling influence of Jezebel are mentioned. Jesus tells the Christians in Thyatira: "Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols" (verse 20).

Dissent was developing from within. That was the real threat to the Church. Attending with members of these congregations were two types of people. The faithful members are those "who cannot bear those who are evil" and "have not known the depths of Satan" (verses 2, 24). But the implication is clear that others could and did "bear those who were evil," and some were beginning to plumb "the depths of Satan."

We find a portrait of the Church near the end of the apostolic era. Satan had successfully infiltrated congregations raised up by the apostles. He lures people away from the faith of Christ, using false prophets to introduce his attitudes and teachings. But, in spite of the devil's efforts, many of the brethren remained strong and faithful, holding fast to the apostles' teachings. Christ complimented them: "... You have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars" (verse 2).

Others, who had lost interest, were beguiled by the heresies of Satan—a being "who deceives the whole world" (Revelation 12:9). One entire congregation was already spiritually dead, having only a few members who were not already too defiled to count as converted Christians. Satan had succeeded in taking over a large portion of Christianity.

So here we find, from Christ's own messages to His Church, that two distinct classifications of Christians emerged from the apostolic era. One group was faithful; the other consisted of people who, for many reasons, were moving further and further away from the true faith of God.

Many who were unfaithful ultimately departed from God's truth. "They went out from us," says John, "but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us" (1 John 2:19).

Two distinct religions developed from the apostolic era: one faithful to Christ, the other deceived by Satan.

John T Pawlikowski, a professor at the Catholic Theological Union of Social Ethics, Chicago, says: "The claimed total opposition to Torah [Old Testament teachings] which theologians, especially in the Protestant churches, frequently made the basis for their theological contrast between Christianity and Judaism (freedom / grace vs. Law) now appears to rest on something less than solid ground" (p. 32). Also: "It is now becoming increasingly apparent to biblical scholars that the lack of a deep immersion into the spirit and content of the Hebrew Scriptures leaves the contemporary Christian with a truncated version of Jesus' message. In effect, what remains is an emasculated version of biblical spirituality" (p. 31).

Robert J. Daly professor of theology and a Jesuit priest, tells us, "Expressed bluntly from the Christian perspective, to be anti-Jewish is to be anti-Christian" (p. 52).

Frederick Holmgren, research professor of Old Testament at a Chicago seminary, explains the significance of the discoveries of these scholars: "Despite Jesus' conflict with some interpreters of his day, both Jewish and Christian scholars see him as one who honored and followed the Law." Holmgren also explains that "Jesus embraced the Torah of Moses; he came not to end it but to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17)— to carry its teachings forward. Further, to those who came to him seeking eternal life, he held it up as the essential teaching to be observed (Luke 10:25-28)" (p. 72).

These and other Christian scholars are changing their views of the status of God's laws in the New Testament. One cannot help but hope that many others will be encouraged by their example to change their prejudices against obeying the Ten Commandments. However, it is most unlikely this understanding will be widely believed and accepted because "the sinful mind is hostile to God" and "does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so" (Romans 8:7, NIV).

Early Trends That Affected the Future of the Church

In Revelation 2 and 3 Jesus Christ sends a different message to each of seven churches in the Roman province of Asia (Asia Minor), part of modern Turkey. The number seven shows completeness, just as seven days make a complete week. The seven messages of Revelation 2 and 3 paint us a comprehensive picture of trends that had already begun and would continue through the history of the Church—trends that would dramatically shape its future. The seven messages give us several good indications why the deep divisions among Christians developed and why this divisiveness continued to plague subsequent generations.

The seven congregations are represented as seven candlesticks in Revelation 1. Together they represent the Church and its mission to be the light of the world (Matthew 5:14). Christ stands in the midst of the seven congregations as the source of their light. He is always present and accessible. He will make good His promise always to be with His Church until the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). But, as is obvious from the messages to the seven congregations, not everyone who comes into the Church will remain faithful to Him.

The seven messages accurately reflect conditions in the Church as it existed in the first century. But they are also prophetic; they reveal some of the reasons for later divisions. Each of the seven congregations receives a warning: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). Each congregation's message is a warning to the other six congregations: The same or similar conditions could develop among them.

In each message Christ cites examples of obedience and disobedience among His followers, showing whom He will bless and whom He will reject. He lavishes compliments

Changes in Christian Scholars' Perspective on God's Law

Regard for God's law in mainstream Christianity has been remarkably inconsistent since the Protestant Reformation. On the one hand, the Ten Commandments have been considered the greatest moral law mankind has ever known. On the other hand, they have usually been regarded as too inconsequential or arbitrary to be obligatory for Christians.

These contradictory views of God's commandments became evident in the 16th century with the theological differences between Martin Luther and John Calvin, the principal founders of Protestant theology. Calvin believed Christians should keep the Ten Commandments, even though he bowed to tradition by substituting the first day of the week for the seventh day in the Fourth Commandment. Calvin's view, though popular in past centuries, steadily lost ground during the 20th century.

Today most Christian denominations reflect, at least in practice, Luther's view toward the commandments of God. Luther incorrectly assumed that the apostle Paul had rejected the authority of the Old Testament just as Luther had rejected the authority of the Catholic hierarchy of his day. But Luther's perception of Paul's teachings was inaccurate.

Luther saw that Paul taught salvation by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8). But Luther took this teaching one step too far, and therein lies the source of his colossal error that later shaped the views of hundreds of millions of people around the world.

He taught that salvation is by faith alone. By this he meant that laws in the Old Testament, including the Ten Commandments, are not binding on Christians. He taught that a simple belief in Christ is sufficient for salvation—that faith alone is all that is necessary. As a result, Luther pitted the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments against each other.

James D.G. Dunn, Lightfoot professor of divinity at the University of Durham, England, explains that Luther's first incorrect assumption was that Paul's personal experience in Judaism was identical to his own experience in the Catholicism of his day. Luther incorrectly assumed Paul was troubled by his personal relationship to God's law.

Dunn then explains: "The trouble with all this is that when Paul speaks explicitly of his own experience before he became a Christian there is nothing of all of this... In Philippians 3:6 he states quite simply that prior to his conversion he regarded himself as 'blameless as regards righteousness within the law.' In other words, there is no indication or hint of a period of guilt-ridden anxiety [in Paul], like that suffered by Luther."

"The second assumption Luther made," continues Dunn, "was that the Judaism of Paul's time was just like the mediaeval Catholicism of Luther's day at least so far as the teaching about God's justice and justification were concerned. The second assumption was natural, given the first. If Paul had made the same discovery of faith as Luther, then he must also have been reacting against the same misunderstanding as Luther" (*The Justice of God*, 1994, pp. 13-14). As a result of these inaccurate assumptions, Luther concluded that Christ's death abolished the laws of God in the Old Testament. He mistakenly deduced that Paul taught the same thing.

But that was not what Paul believed or taught. During the past 30 years Paul's obedience to the teachings of the Old Testament Scriptures have been categorically confirmed by many Christian and Jewish scholars.

Here are some comments from scholars on this subject from *Removing Anti-Judaism from the Pulpit* (edited by Howard Kee, emeritus professor of biblical studies at Boston University, and Irvin Borowsky chairman of the American Interfaith Institute, 1996).

and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed" (Daniel 7:13-14).

"Then the LORD will go forth . . . And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley . . . Thus the LORD my God will come, and all the saints with You . . . And the LORD shall be King over all the earth" (Zechariah 14:3-5, 9).

Jesus Christ and His apostles spoke of this same world-ruling government, which He called "the Kingdom of God." In Luke 21, after describing a series of trends and events unparalleled in history, He concluded: "Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near . . . When you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near" (verses 28-31).

The ancient prophets, Jesus and His apostles all spoke of a literal kingdom that will supersede the world's governments. When these prophecies become a reality, a triumphant cry will ring out: "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" (Revelation 11:15).

Sadly, this message is seldom understood and rarely taught in churches. Many have accepted "a different gospel" (Galatians 1:6) that distorts and obscures this vital biblical truth. You will read in the next chapter how this "other gospel" (verses 8-9), as Paul labels it, evolved and spread throughout the world.

However, you can discover for yourself the full meaning of the gospel—the incredible good news—that Jesus Christ and the apostles preached. This same gospel is faithfully preached by the United Church of God (Matthew 24:14). For a full explanation of the true gospel, be sure to request your free copy of *The Gospel of the Kingdom* from our office nearest you.

Is Today the Only Day of Salvation?

Is our present age the only time during which people can repent and be saved?

Some people assume that is what the apostle Paul meant when he wrote: "As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says, 'In the time of my favour I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.' I tell you, now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:1-2, NIV). Paul meant exactly what he said. But be sure to notice what Paul did not say He did not say that today is the only day of salvation, nor was that his intent.

In the original Greek there is no modifier before the phrase "day of salvation" in this verse. Most translations have added the word *the* before day in an attempt to clarify Paul's words—but in so doing have inadvertently distorted the meaning. The Darby Translation italicizes "the" here to indicate that it has been added. Other versions translate this phrase as "a day of salvation" (*Green's Literal Translation, Living Oracles New Testament*).

Still other versions inconsistently translate the same phrase as "a day of salvation" in the first part of the verse and "the day of salvation" in the latter part (*American Standard Version, Bible in Basic English, Green's Literal Translation, Modern King James Version, New Revised Standard Version, Phillips Modern English*).

For those in the Church in this age, now is their day of salvation. God is calling them now. Salvation is available today to anyone who is willing to repent. That is what Paul meant. But he neither said nor implied that salvation is available only in this age. Paul in no way meant to contradict the many passages in the Bible that show that many others will have an opportunity for salvation in future ages.

The disciples were selfish. They argued among themselves as to who would be the greatest (Mark 9:33-34; Luke 22:24). James and John even tried to finagle Jesus into awarding them the two most prominent positions in His Kingdom (Mark 10:35-37).

Like any other people, each of them greatly overestimated his faithfulness and loyalty to Christ. "... Jesus said to them, 'All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: "I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered"' ... Peter said to Him, 'Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be.' Jesus said to him, 'Assuredly, I say to you that today even this night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times.' But he spoke more vehemently 'If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!' And they all said likewise" (Mark 14:27-31).

As they spoke those words, the disciples believed they would loyally do as they had said. Yet within hours they all abandoned Jesus to suffer alone (Mark 14:50). Peter even cursed and swore that he had never even known Jesus (Matthew 26:69-75; Luke 22:54-62).

After Jesus' execution, Peter and six of the other apostles decided it was time to give up all they had learned and resume their career as fishermen (John 21:2-3). They had heard Jesus speak about His death and resurrection, but their limited perspective blinded them to the significance of Jesus' sayings. That same blindness is a part of all human beings until God opens their understanding to see what He really says in His Word.

Even after hearing reports of Jesus' resurrection, Thomas was so skeptical that he commented. "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe" (John 20:25). Jesus later appeared and provided Thomas with the precise proof he requested (verses 26-29).

These were the men Jesus chose to carry His gospel to every nation. As yet they had not received God's Spirit. They were as powerless as any other human would be to fulfill their intentions and commitments to faithfully serve their Savior. It was impossible for them to be the special servants of Christ on their own strength.

Now we can understand Jesus' remark when His disciples asked Him, "Who then can be saved?" His answer: "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:25-26).

What Is the True Gospel?

What was Jesus Christ's message? He preached "the gospel of the kingdom of God" (Matthew 4:23; 9:35; Mark 1:14-15). The Old English word gospel, or "good spell," means "good news." The good news was the centerpiece of His message. He defined His mission with these words: "I must preach the kingdom of God .. because for this purpose I have been sent" (Luke 4:43).

What did He command His disciples to teach? "He sent them to preach the kingdom of God ..." (Luke 9:2, 6). What is that message about, and why is it such good news?

When Jesus Christ taught about the Kingdom of God (Luke 8:1; 9:11; 12:31; 13:18), He was simply continuing the messages of the Hebrew prophets whose words are recorded in the Old Testament. Centuries earlier God had inspired such faithful men as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and Zechariah to look beyond the difficulties and destruction of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah to a magnificent future when God would establish His world-ruling kingdom on earth under the reign of the Messiah.

Notice some of their prophecies describing this wonderful occurrence:

"I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations,

" It is the planting of God to bring forth fruit to His glory (1 Cor. 3:10; *cf.* Jn. 15:1*f.*).

"It is the temple of God, built by God Himself in Christ to be His dwelling and therefore to be the center of true holiness and worship (Eph.2:21*f.*; *cf.* Jn.2:19*f.*; 1 Cor. 3:9; 1 Pet. 2:4*f.*).

"It is the bride of Christ for which the Bridegroom gave Himself that it might be presented, cleansed, sanctified, and pure at the eternal marriage feast (Eph. 5:25).

"It is the body of Christ, the fullness of Him that fills all in all, Christ Himself being the head (Eph. 4:15*f.*) and yet also in a true sense the totality (1 Cor. 12:12), with each Christian being a member in particular (1 Cor. 12:27)."

These references tell us much about the biblical definition of the Church. Rather than a building, the Church is a called-out assembly — the group of believers invited to come out of the world for God's special purpose.

Note: The "*f.*" after Bible verses means "see also the next verse. The "*ff.*" means "see also the next verses. The "*cf.*" means "compare the following passage."

The Apostles: A Case Study in Conversion

The coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4) transformed the apostles of Jesus Christ from a group of ordinary men into some of the most remarkable and dynamic leaders the world has known. To appreciate the magnitude of their transformation, we need to take a closer look at the same men before they received God's Spirit.

The four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—provide us with insight into their lives. We see no indication that any of the 12 apostles had an exceptional education or any position of influence. They were common men, regarded as "uneducated and untrained" by the rulers and religious authorities of that time (Acts 4:13).

Matthew was a tax collector, a member of one of the despised professions of his day (Matthew 9:9; 18:17). Peter, his brother Andrew and two other brothers, James and John, were partners in a modest fishing enterprise (Matthew 4:18-22, Luke 5:1-10). Along with Philip, they lived in the town of Bethsaida in the northern province of Galilee (John 1:44). The only special thing about them was that they were disciples—students and followers—of Jesus Christ.

Even more striking is the level of their lack of spiritual comprehension during their time of training. Their minds were still controlled by their fleshly nature. Their thinking and behavior were "carnal" (Romans 8:5-7). Jesus rebuked them for their lack of belief and hardness of heart (Mark 16:14).

Their attitudes and behavior during that time illustrate that even living in the presence of Jesus Christ while He was on earth—personally hearing Him teach and seeing His example—was not sufficient to transform their thinking from carnal to spiritual.

Jesus sternly chastised James and John for their attitude toward some who had rejected Jesus. "But they [the Samaritans] did not receive Him . . . And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, 'Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?' But He turned and rebuked them, and said, 'You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them'" (Luke 9:53-57). John would later become known as "the apostle of love"—quite a turnaround for a man who had urged Jesus Christ to annihilate a village.

"*Ecclesia* was used primarily to designate a particular communal reality not to describe its qualitative aspects. Where the distinctive qualities and dimensions of community life were intended, other terms proved more flexible and evocative.

"In comparison with these other terms, *ecclesia* was relatively neutral and colorless, conveying by itself little theological meaning. It was open to use, without basic shift in meaning, by unbelievers as well as by believers. Even among those writers who made wide use of *ecclesia*, other terms were more expressive of the reality at hand."

"Church" and "Congregation" in the Scriptures

The exact relationship of the New Testament Church (Greek *ekklesia*) to the congregation of Israel in the Old Testament can best be understood when we learn the different interpretations placed on the two Hebrew words for "congregation": *'edah* and *qahal*.

The Holman Bible Dictionary, in its article "Congregation," explains that these Hebrew words were used with a significantly different meaning in the days of Christ and the apostles.

"In the Greek Old Testament [the Septuagint] *'edah* was usually translated [into Greek as] *sunagoge*, [and] *qahal* [as] *ekklesia*. In late Judaism [the Greek word] *sunagoge* depicted the actual Israelite people and [the word] *ekklesia* the ideal elect of God called to salvation. Hence [the Greek word] *ekklesia* became the term for the Christian congregation, the church . . . There is a direct spiritual continuity between the congregation of the Old Testament and the New Testament Church. Significantly the Christian community chose the Old Testament term for the ideal people of God called to salvation (*ekklesia*), rather than the term which described all Israelites collectively (*sunagoge*)."

This explains why the New Testament word for the Church, *ekklesia*, refers only to those people, Jews and gentiles, who are called by God to receive salvation through Jesus Christ. Therefore the Church of God, the term most generally applied to God's people in English translations of the New Testament, is the body of people who are special to God because they *obey His Word* and *accept His Son*, Jesus Christ, as the Messiah.

Biblical Phrases and Terms for God's Special People

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia summarizes the other descriptions of the people of God in the New Testament (emphasis added):

"This Church is not a human organization; it is God's workmanship (Eph. 2:10)... It may thus be described in several pregnant phrases, of which the following are to be noted.

"The Church is the people or Israel of God (Eph. 2:12; cf. 1 Peter 2:10), in whom there is fulfillment of the ancient covenant promise: 'I will be your God, and you shall be my people.'

"It is the household or family of God (Eph. 2:19; 3:15; 4:6), consisting of those who are adopted by God as sons and heirs in Christ.

Testament for the people of God reveals their understanding of the continuity that links the Old and New Testaments. The early Christians understood themselves as the people of the God who had revealed Himself in the Old Testament (Heb. 1:1-2), as the true children of Israel (Rom. 2:28-29) with Abraham as their father (Rom. 4:1-25), and as the people of the New Covenant prophesied in the Old Testament (Heb. 8:1-13).

"As a consequence of this broad background of meaning in the Greek and Old Testament worlds, the term 'church' is used in the New Testament of a local congregation of called-out Christians, such as the 'church of God which is at Corinth' (1 Cor. 1:2), and also of the entire people of God, such as in the affirmation that Christ is 'the head over all things to the church, which is his body' (Eph. 1:22-23)."

How the Word *Church* is Used in Greek and English

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia gives this view of the usage of church in Greek and English:

"Theologically there is only one Church, for Christians are now fellow citizens of the saints and of the household of God (*sic*), built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets."

The New Unger's Bible Dictionary explains the ways church is used in English:

"The word church is employed to express various ideas, some of which are scriptural, others not. It may be used to signify: (1) The entire body of those who are saved by their relation to Christ. (2) A particular Christian denomination. (3) The aggregate of all the ecclesiastical communions, professing faith in Christ. (4) A single organized Christian group. (5) A building designated for Christian worship."

In contrast, *The Holman Bible Dictionary* summarizes the biblical usage of the word:

"Church is the term used in the New Testament most frequently to describe a group of persons professing trust in Jesus Christ, meeting together to worship Him, and seeking to enlist others to become His followers."

This resource correctly defines church as a group of people.

The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible describes in some detail the usage of church in the New Testament:

"For that reality which is designated in English most commonly by the word 'church,' there are in the NT many diverse terms, each with its own etymological and theological history. Each term conveys in varying contexts a large cluster of shifting connotations and associations.

"In contemporary English usage, 'church' as a word dominates the ecclesiological vocabulary. It comes through German and Latin from the Greek *kyriakon*, which means 'that which belongs to the Lord (*sic*, or better, "Master").' In NT Greek, *ekklesia* (almost always translated in English by 'church') is by no means so dominating or central a term.

"Of the 112 appearances of *ekklesia* [Latin spelling] in the NT, 90 per cent are found in Paul's letters, the book of Acts, and Revelation. From ten books (Mark, Luke, John, II Timothy Titus, I-II Peter, I-II John, and Jude) *this word is absent*.

CHURCH

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[Ed note: Although this is not a Sacred Name teaching, I find it to be a very useful introduction for those in churchianity toward the lesser known concepts of Messianic Israel. The teaching ends with Bible mistranslations; and ideal segue might be the deliberate gloss of the sacred name.]

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[Middle English *chirche*, from Old English *cirice*, ultimately from Medieval Greek *kyrikon*, from Late Greek *kyriakon doma*), *the Master's house*, neuter of Greek *kyriakos*, *of the master*, from *kyrios*, *master / lord*. See *keu-* in Indo-European Roots – **keu-** II. Zero-grade form **kū-* (< **ku-*). 2. Basic form **kū-*. a. Suffixed form **kū-ro-*, "swollen," strong, powerful. [church](#), [kirk](#), [Kyrie](#); [kermis](#), from Greek *kyrios* (vocative *kyrie*), master, lord.]

The Historical Background of the Term Church

The Holman Bible Dictionary, in its article "Church," explains the background of the word *church*:

"Church is the English translation of the Greek word *ekklesia*. The use of the Greek term *prior to the emergence of the Christian church* is important as two streams of meaning flow from the history of its usage into the New Testament understanding of church.

"First, the Greek term which basically means 'called out' was commonly used to indicate an assembly of citizens of a Greek city and is so used in Acts 19:32, 39. The citizens who were quite conscious of their privileged status over against slaves and non-citizens were called to the assembly by a herald and dealt. . . with matters of common concern. When the early Christians understood themselves as constituting a church, no doubt exists that they perceived themselves as called out by God (*sic*) in Jesus Christ for a special purpose and that their status was a privileged one in Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:19).

"Second, the Greek term was used more than one hundred times in the Greek translation of the Old Testament in common use in the time of Jesus. The Hebrew term (*qahal*) meant simply 'assembly' and could be used in a variety of ways, referring for example to an assembling of prophets (1 Sam. 19:20), soldiers (Num. 22:4), or the people of God (Deut. 9:10). The use of the term in the Old Testament in referring to the people of God is important for understanding the term 'church' in the New Testament.

"The first Christians were Jews who used the Greek translation of the Old Testament. For them to use a self-designation that was common in the Old