

I. The Beginning of the Church

1. The first Time to Mention Church

Scripture Reading

Matthew 16:18 and I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it..

God first mentions the church, the very first time the term “church” is used in the universe, is in Matthew 16. Although the church is first mentioned here, the church did not begin at this point. The Lord only said He would build His church, not that He had already begun to build it. Here, He was prophesying the building of the church. At that time, the church was still something the Lord prophesied, its beginning yet future.

Then in Matthew 18:17, the Lord mentions the church a second time—these are the only two times He uses the word “church” in the Four Gospels. His words show us that the church He prophesied in chapter 16 was not far off. For He told the disciples listening to Him then that they could bring matters they could not resolve to the church. This proves the church would soon be among them. But when exactly did the church begin? Let us look further:

2. The Church came forth

Scripture Reading

John 20:21–22 Jesus said to them again Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me even so I am sending you. And when he had said this he breathed on them and said to them Receive the Holy Spirit.

Although the disciples followed the Lord for three and a half years, their lives

remained their original old natural lives before Jesus Christ accomplished the full work of redemption. Only when the Lord completed His redemption, truly became the life-giving Spirit, and breathed Himself into the disciples, could these disciples be called the church.

(For the church is composed of people who possess the same nature, status, and life as Christ.)

3. Church expansion on Pentecost

Scripture Reading

Acts 2:41–47 so those who received his word were baptized and there were added that day about three thousand souls and they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and the fellowship to the breaking of bread and the prayers and awe came upon every soul and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles and all who believed were together and had all things in common and they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need and day by day attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes they received their food with glad and generous hearts praising God and having favor with all the people and the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

This refers to what happened on the day of Pentecost. It is the first-time enlargement of the church. When the Holy Spirit came down at Pentecost, the church was established, and the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. From that time onward, all redeemed believers were collectively called the church by the Holy Spirit. All these facts prove that the church came into being exactly when the Holy Spirit descended on the day of Pentecost.

Even though Christ had come to the earth, the church could not yet begin. It was necessary for Christ to pass through death on the cross, resurrection and ascension, and then come as the Spirit before the church could be brought forth. There can be no

church apart from Christ, nor can there be a church without the cross and the Holy Spirit. The church is brought forth through Christ's crucifixion, resurrection and transformation into the life-giving Spirit. This principle remains true even today. Where there are Christ, the cross and the Holy Spirit, there the genuine church exists in reality. These three are all indispensable to the church; lacking any one of them, the existence and formation of the church cannot stand firm. Therefore, to know the church rightly, we must know Christ, the cross and the Holy Spirit.