

THE DOCTRINE OF A PRE-PENTECOST CHURCH

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It is necessarily certain that the Church have a beginning point, if it is to have an ending point. To assign no beginning to it would make it eternal. To then point to an end would be enigmatic, and oxymoronic. While, theologically, the Church, only as an organism, will forever be in existence (Ephesians 3:21), both in its nature, and as a program, it has a beginning. Only in its program, then, is there found an ending, namely, at the Rapture.

Ample proponents of several varying views can be found. However, all the views can be narrowed down to two eras, in general. All either place the beginning of the Church in the Old Testament, or the New Testament. That may appear boringly obvious, but not when one discerns that Old Testament must not be restricted to Genesis through Malachi. Any point in time prior to Calvary is Old Testament, including the lifetime of our Lord upon this earth! The law reigned until Calvary, when it was fulfilled, and grace took over (Matthew 5:17; John 1:17, Galatians 3:13,23), as the rule of life.

However, this author is not satisfied with simply establishing the origin within a New Testament context. Such a view could place it, and someone can be found who does so, ranging anywhere from "The Upper Room," to Acts, Chapter 28. The only tenable position for the origin of the Church is the New Testament Day of Pentecost.

Now that the gauntlet has been thrown down, the Old Testament origin position must be exposed, that its error may be clearly seen, and the Biblical view triumphant. The Pentecost position will prevail in Bible exegesis. That will become evident as the flaws of the pre-Pentecost origin are manifest. What about a pre-Pentecost beginning for the Church?

1. IT WOULD BE A MISFIT.

Was there a church in the dispensation of the law? How could a church under law proclaim a gospel of pure grace? It met on Saturday, in the Old Testament Jewish Temple. It had the distinctions of male/female, bond/free, Jew/Greek; was in bondage to the law, offered the gospel only to the Jews (Matthew 10:5,6), preached only the Gospel of the Kingdom (Matthew 10:7), was not "in Christ", was not justified by the finished work of Christ, and was not an organism, but merely an organization. What kind of church is that? It is a church out of place (Galatians 3:23-28).

A Church prior to Pentecost is a Misfit.

2. IT WOULD BE OWNER-LESS.

Christ said, "I will build my church". His church. There was a "church" in the Old Testament! The Greek, *ἐκκλησία*, is literally, a "called out assembly, and is translated by the English "Church," in the New Testament. Such existed in the Old Testament, both in Israel (Acts 7:38), and in contemporary government of Paul's day (Acts 19:32, 39, 41). But this "new" one is to be His church (Matthew 16:18). If it was then existing, and already His, why did He have to, in the future, purchase it with His own blood (Ephesians 5:25; Acts 20:28), in order to make it His. If it already existed, why did Christ have to build it, in the future? "I will" is

simple future. The word, in Matthew 16:18, is "build", a simple future. It does not allow for translating it "build up", as some claim.

A Church prior to Pentecost is Owner-less.

3. IT WOULD BE HEADLESS.

Note the order of Ephesians 1:20-23. Christ was:

- a. raised;
- b. set on the Father's right hand;
- c. Made the head of all creation (22a, with Colossians 1:15 – 17. Christ is the Firstborn of all creation. Only, however, by virtue of the resurrection is He "firstborn," as regards the family of God (Colossians 1:18). See Hebrews 3:6, Christ, "Son over His own House"; Hebrews 1:2 appointed heir"; v.4, "being made so much better than angels"; v.5, which was fulfilled in the resurrection;
- d. "Given to be the Head over...the church...His body." This church head-ship follows the resurrection. While this standing alone does not prove the Pentecost position, it does--all by itself--disallow the pre-Pentecost position. Christ could not be the Head of the Church, until after the resurrection.

A church prior to the resurrection is a headless body, a monstrosity.

4. IT WOULD BE FOUNDATIONLESS.

Ephesians 2:20 plainly proclaims a church founded on the apostles. A church beginning at the Baptism of Christ, or, with John the Baptist, would be without foundation, as the apostles were not appointed until later. Again, this does not prove a Pentecost origin. However, as many independent Baptists hold that the Church began with Christ, the above fact presents an obstacle too high to hurdle. The potential rebuttal might be, that Christ did not begin the church until He called the apostles, in Matthew Ten.

One only asks, "Where is the scripture indicating that Christ began the Church in His lifetime?": What passage declares the point, in His life and ministry on earth, at which He began it? Was it with John the Baptist at Christ's baptism, when He called twelve out of His disciples and appointed them Apostles? Or, when He sent forth the Seventy, two by two? (Luke 10:1).

If the Church began prior to Matthew 10, then the building was built without either foundation, or a cornerstone.

A Church begun at the Baptism of Christ is Without Foundation.

5. IT WOULD BE DEAD.

There is no church without Holy Spirit Baptism (I Corinthians 12:13), for the church (i.e., Body) is one. That is directly by the work of the Spirit (Ephesians 2:14,18,22). There are no church members apart from Holy Spirit baptism (I Corinthians 12:13), and no Holy Spirit Baptism until Pentecost.

John 7:39 clearly teaches that there was no indwelling H.S., hence no indwelling life, in Christ's day (note John 14:17b), and that the Holy Spirit could not be given until Christ was glorified. So, at

least there could be no church organism prior to the glorification of Christ.

A Church prior to Pentecost is Lifeless.

6. IT WOULD BE AHEAD OF TIME.

There is a question then as to when Christ was glorified. At the resurrection, or at the ascension? John 12:16 declares the disciples' ignorance of Old Testament prophecy remained until the glorification of Christ (Note John 17:5). Luke 24:45 shows Christ gave them understanding on the day of the resurrection. The point of glorification's accomplishment could help settle the issue of the alleged "embryonic beginning" in John Twenty. Glorification at the resurrection could allow for it. But, glorification not until the ascension would deny the possibility of the Holy Spirit being received in any form, for any purpose, in John Twenty.

However, consider this alleged embryo. What is it? Were members somehow placed into the body in some kind of imperfect form? Some way growing and developing into a body? Did Holy Spirit baptism first occur in John 20? Not according to Luke 24:49, with Acts 1:4, 5.

We are BORN into the FAMILY OF GOD. We are BAPTIZED into the BODY OF CHRIST. The Bible nowhere speaks of any birth for the church. That is man's terminology. While it is an organism, it is by creation, and not by procreation. It is a new creation in the same way as was Eve. She is a type of the Church—created, and not born. If the church's origin is embryonic, leading to a birth, then the Head, of necessity, was also being formed! The Church's Head was, in such a case, also born. Else, a headless body was being formed for birth. Then, there logically must have been a conception prior to the birth. One surely would eagerly await for pre-Pentecost proponents to explain that!

In reality, Christ was established the Head and the body was formed, by new creation, in the same instant--AT PENTECOST! Consider Adam and Eve, types of Christ and His Church, or, the Head and the Body. There was no Eve until Adam's side was opened and blood was shed. Neither was Eve born. She was created...alive, with maturity...out of Adam.

A church prior to Pentecost is...premature! to say the least.

7. IT WOULD BE ESCHATOLOGICALLY CONFUSING.

Attempts to faithfully adhere to dispensational principles will become frustrated with a church program operating outside properly defined boundaries of the Dispensation of Grace. The Church Program must be seen as a separate program enacted after Calvary. Else, difficulties arise in the eschatology of the four gospels, relating to God's purposes for Jew, Gentile and the Church.

A church prior to Pentecost is confusion.

While this study has been developed from a kind of negative standpoint, positive, principled exegesis of the scriptures clearly presents a Pentecost beginning for the Church. The plan of God is clear: At Pentecost, Holy Spirit Baptism occurred for the first time in history (Acts 2:4 with 11:15). I Corinthians 12:3 establishes that converts are baptized "by" the Holy Spirit, into the Body of Christ. None of the elements for a living, united, vibrant

organism, called the Church, was extant until the Day of Pentecost. None of the exalted attributes of Christ was present until the Day of Pentecost. One argument, often touted by pre-Pentecost advocates, concerns Acts 2:47 "...And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." They say that for the Lord to add to the Church, it had to already be in existence. Such an argument is exactly on target. Only their time frame needs to be corrected.

Pentecost's experience occurred at 9:00 A.M. Approximately 120 believers were baptized by the Holy Spirit into the Body of Christ—which in turn was simultaneously created with, and at the time of that event. While the text in question refers to days following Pentecost (Acts 2:46), the Day of Pentecost would be included. The Lord did add to that which was already in existence: The Church was created on that Pentecost morning, and throughout the day, and ensuing days, as sinners were saved, they were added to that blessed Body.

Truth, inherent in the events of Pentecost, points to a Pentecost beginning for the Church. Nothing in the gospel records even remotely suggests the contemporary origin of a church. Matthew 16:18, by simple, normal, interpretation of words, clearly shows the origin of the Church to be future from the day those words were declared.

The Pentecost position is a Biblically principled position. All other positions are cross-threaded right-hand-thread nuts, on a left-hand-thread bolt. They have to be forced into place, never quite fit properly, and are always at risk of stripping out the threads. They just won't secure the doctrine of the Church firmly in the construction of systematic theology.

THE PENTECOST BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH IS A BIBLE TRUTH.