

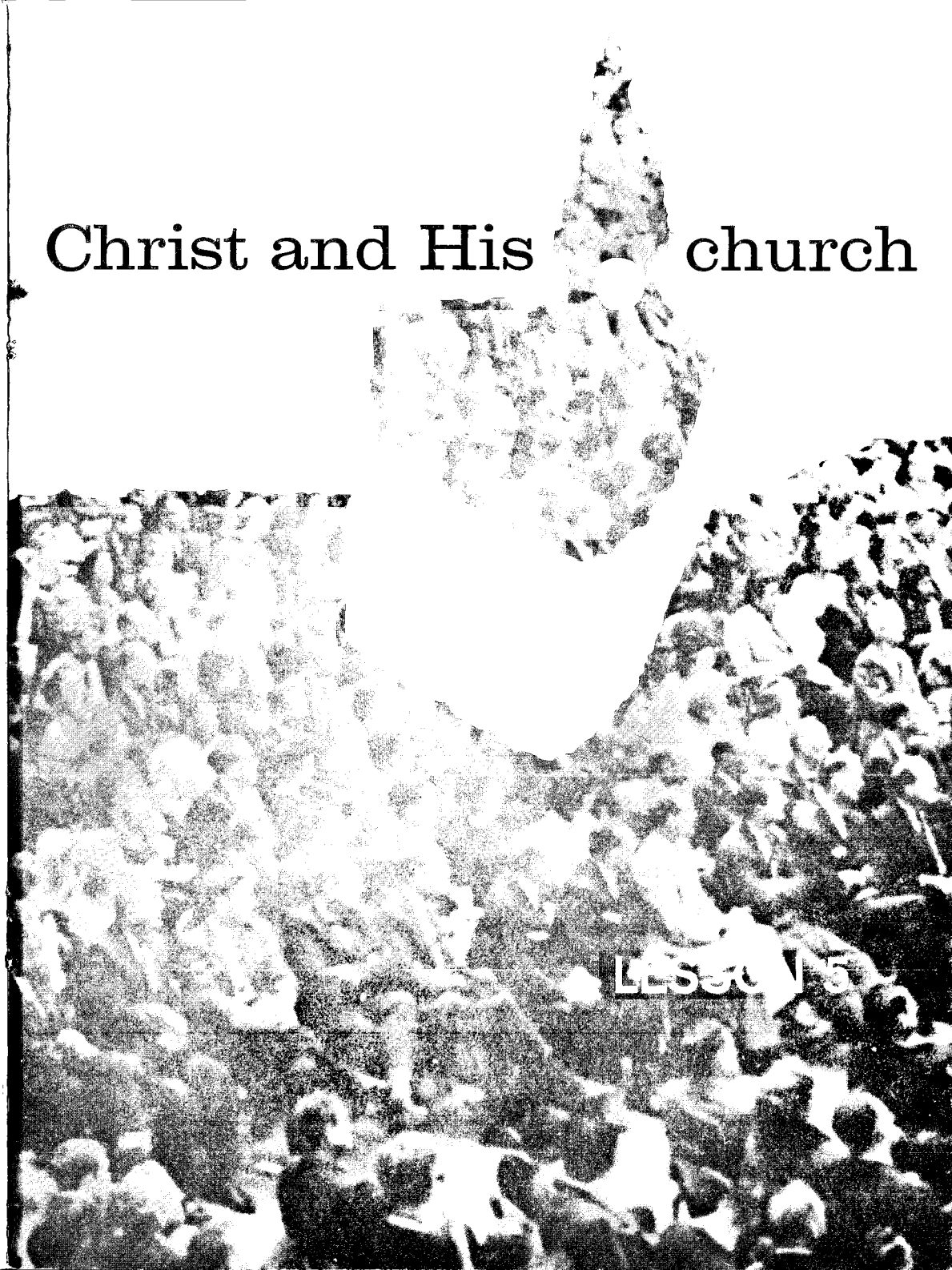
NEW YORK WORLD'S FAIR BIBLE CORRESPONDENCE COURSE

# CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH

LESSON FIVE

# Christ and His church

LESSON 5



## THE NEW TESTAMENT CONCEPT

According to the 1964 edition of the *Yearbook of American Churches*, 117,946,002 Americans are members of some religious body. This is 63.4 per cent of the total population, the greatest percentage in American history.

It can scarcely be said, then, that the church is an unknown phenomenon to Americans. No doubt the same is true for most of the other peoples of the world.<sup>1</sup> Even those who are not members of any church hear of it in everyday conversations, in watching television, in reading newspapers, and in a wide area of intellectual pursuits. Yet, few people are informed about the church as it existed and functioned in the first century after its establishment by Jesus. Few gain their knowledge from reading about the church in the New Testament. A study of Christ and His church is likely to bring out a body of information quite startling to the average person.

First of all, the early church was the "called out" body of believers, as the Greek word *ekklesia* (the language in which the New Testament was written) indicates. Christ's Word preached to the peoples of Palestine extended the "call" for men to come and follow the Lord. "But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth. Whereunto he called you by our

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1. Christendom claims 916 million adherents throughout the world, according to Encyclopedia Britannica's 1963 Book of the Year. The three major classifications are: Roman Catholic, 558 million; Protestant, 219 million; Eastern Orthodox, 138 million.

gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (II Thessalonians 2:13, 14).\*

## THE CHURCH IS PEOPLE

The church is not a building, it is not a denomination, it is not a council of officials; but it is the body of believers living under the authority of Jesus Christ.

Since the church is the body of believers, membership in it depends, not upon the decisions of men, but upon the Lord. In the second chapter of Acts one reads that those who were convicted in their hearts of Christ's death and resurrection were told to "Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins" (Acts 2:38).

After baptism they did not decide to join some church group, as if they had any choice in the matter. Others did not vote upon their acceptability to some church, as if men have any authority in the matter.

*God added them to the church.* "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47). He added them to those who already had accepted Jesus as Lord, responded to His teachings, and had committed themselves to His service. These were Christ's people, His followers, His disciples, His assembly. United in the same body, they moved in obedience to His will and determined to carry the gospel to the whole world.

## ONE HEAD, ONE FOUNDATION

Christ himself bears an indispensable relation to this body of people, for He is its head, and it moves under His authority. He is the one who called forth the church; He is its founder. "When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying. Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And

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\* Read the text of all scriptural references. All quotations in this lesson are taken from the King James Version. For those using other versions, the words may differ but the meanings are the same.

they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church” (Matthew 16:13-18).

Christ — not Abraham, not Moses, not John the Baptist, not the apostle Peter, nor any other man — built His Church. He is its foundation and it is His (I Corinthians 3:11; Ephesians 5:23).

Furthermore, Christ is the head of His Church, and the only head the New Testament authorizes or reveals. “And hath put all things under his 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” (Ephesians 1:22-23). “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” (Colossians 1:18).

The medieval mind could not understand a church without an earthly head for it sought earthly counterparts for all heavenly provisions. The development of a visible head of the church on earth, which was accelerated by the doctrine of apostolic succession, reached its height in the Middle Ages. Yet Peter, from all that can be discovered in the New Testament, *in no sense considered himself the head of the church in its beginning or anytime.*

## THE CHURCH PURPOSED BY GOD

Headship involves an organic connection with the source of life. Christ is the source of life to his followers. Headship involves guidance and direction in the same way that the mind controls and guides the body. Members of the Church of Christ are controlled by Christ. They live by His will. His life is the inspiration for their lives; it sets the course they pursue.

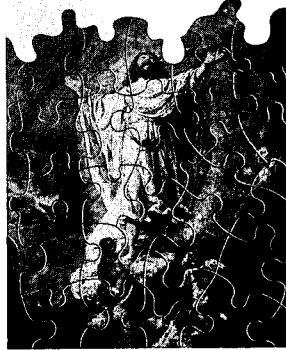
Since Christ was in the beginning with God (John 1:1) and since the church is His, it is a glorious church (Ephesians 5:27). When the church follows His Word, the wisdom of God, who created it, is made manifest to all the world: “To the intent that

now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Ephesians 3:10-11).

As a fellowship of believers it exhibits God’s wisdom — just as beautiful buildings display the wisdom and skill of their architects. Furthermore, in proclaiming the gospel it publishes to the world the wisdom of God — wisdom contained in the priceless treasures of the Word.

Paul in a sweeping eulogy declared, “Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Ephesians 3:21).

#### Christ our MASTER



#### YOUR NEXT LESSON . . .

*Christ Our Master* describes the beauties and duties of discipleship and stresses the substance of the Christian life of faith.

## LESSON FIVE: Review

*The questions below are based on the following passages in the Word of God: II Thessalonians 2:13-14; John 6:44-45; Acts 2:36-47; Matthew 16:13-18; Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:13-24; Ephesians 4:4-6; 5:22-31; 3:8-21. Read each passage carefully and thoroughly before completing the exercise. The questions are designed for brief answers — sometimes only one word, or a few words, or a sentence at the most.*

1. How does God call men to be saved?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What was required of those who believed the Gospel and desired to be saved?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Did these people mentioned in the second chapter of Acts select a church to join?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Who adds people to the church?  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. How many were baptized on Pentecost, the day the church began?  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Is the church described in the New Testament a building, a denomination, or what?  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Who established the church?  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Upon what great truth or rock was the church built?  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. Who, therefore, is the foundation of the church?  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. Who is the only head of the church authorized in the New Testament?  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. How is the church described to indicate its relation to Christ, its head?  
\_\_\_\_\_

12. Who does God intend to receive pre-eminence in the church?  
\_\_\_\_\_
13. What passage teaches that the New Testament church was one in character, doctrine, and practice?  
\_\_\_\_\_
14. What physical relationship does Paul use to describe the closeness of Christ and His church?  
\_\_\_\_\_
15. How did Christ demonstrate His love for the church?  
\_\_\_\_\_
16. The church is subject to whom?  
\_\_\_\_\_
17. What kind of life should the church manifest to make a glorious presentation to Christ?  
\_\_\_\_\_
18. What was Paul to preach among the Gentiles?  
\_\_\_\_\_
19. Who has been authorized to make known the manifold wisdom of God?  
\_\_\_\_\_
20. Who is to glorify God throughout all ages?  
\_\_\_\_\_

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Completed by:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City and State \_\_\_\_\_

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# YOUR COMMENTS/QUESTIONS

*We welcome your response.  
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