

The term church comes from the Greek word “ekklesia”, which means “called out ones.” It does not refer to a building, but to a people—a community of believers who have been called out of darkness into God’s marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9). Therefore, the church is not a physical structure, but a spiritual body of believers united in Christ.

The Birth of the Church: Pentecost

According to the Bible, the true church was born on the Day of Pentecost, following the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. On that day, as Jesus had promised (John 14:16-17; Acts 1:8), the Holy Spirit descended upon the believers who were gathered in Jerusalem. This marked the beginning of the New Covenant church, empowered by the Spirit to carry out the mission of God.

In Acts 2, Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, preached to a large crowd, explaining that what they were witnessing was the fulfillment of prophecy:

But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

‘And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God,

That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh...’

(Acts 2:16-17 NKJV)

The result of Peter’s sermon was powerful:

Acts 2:37-42 (NKJV):

37 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

38 Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

39 For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”

40 And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.”

41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.

42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

These four pillars—apostolic teaching, fellowship, the Lord’s Supper, and prayer—became the foundation of the early church, not buildings or hierarchy, but spiritual devotion and obedience to Christ.

The Roman Catholic Church: A Later Institution

The Roman Catholic Church, which is often mistakenly referred to as the “first church,” did not emerge until centuries later. It was officially institutionalized during the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD, long after the apostolic era had ended. While it claims apostolic succession, many of its doctrines and practices significantly depart from the teaching and simplicity of the early church.

Here are key theological concerns:

1. Apostolic Teaching (Doctrine)

The true early church remained faithful to the doctrine of Christ and His apostles (2 John 1:9). However, the Catholic Church introduced doctrines not found in Scripture, such as:

Veneration of Saints and Images:

Scripture clearly warns against idol worship and the use of images in worship:

You shall not make for yourself a carved image... You shall not bow down to them nor serve them.

(Exodus 20:4-5)

Multiple Mediators:

The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and man:

For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.

(1 Timothy 2:5)

In contrast, Catholic teaching elevates Mary as co-mediatrix, a title and role not supported by Scripture.

2. The Breaking of Bread (The Lord's Supper)

In the early church, every believer shared in the Lord's Supper regularly (Acts 2:46). Paul emphasizes in 1 Corinthians 11 that communion is a remembrance of Christ's sacrifice, and it is to be taken by all who believe, not just by priests.

However, Catholicism restricts communion to those deemed worthy by the clergy, and often only the priest drinks the wine, which is contrary to Jesus' instruction:

Drink from it, all of you.

(Matthew 26:27)

3. Fellowship Among Believers

The early church emphasized unity, love, and shared life (Acts 2:44–47). Fellowship was not based on status, office, or ritual, but on mutual devotion and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

In contrast, the Catholic structure introduced a hierarchical system that often distances clergy from laity, creating spiritual dependency on priests rather than on Christ and the community of believers.

4. Prayer and Worship

Prayer in the early church was direct, sincere, and Spirit-led (Acts 4:24–31; Philippians 4:6). Believers prayed directly to God the Father in the name of Jesus Christ, as Jesus taught (John

16:23-24).

Yet in Catholic tradition, many prayers are directed to Mary and saints, often repeated using rosaries, which resembles pagan prayer practices Jesus warned against:

And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do.

(Matthew 6:7)

Moreover, the emphasis on statues, relics, and incense in worship mirrors Old Testament shadows that were fulfilled in Christ (Hebrews 10:1)

Conclusion

The first true church was not a building or a religious institution—it was a living, Spirit-filled community of believers who had repented, been baptized, and were walking in obedience to the apostles' teaching.

Any church that departs from the foundation of Scripture, Christ-centered worship, the fellowship of believers, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit must be measured against the Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Related Topics for Deeper Study:

- Who Is Mary According to the Bible?
- What Is the Liberty of the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:17)?
- Is the Virgin Mary the Queen of Heaven? (Compare with Jeremiah 7:18)
- Is It Biblical to Call Mary the Mother of God? (Luke 1:43; John 1:1,14)

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