

The First Church **Text: Ephesians 4:1–6**

And the Falling Away

“Those who do not know history are bound to repeated it.”

(and those who do know history are bound to see it repeated over and over)

1. The Mystery of God’s Eternal Plan (Eph 3)

- a. The Mystery of God’s Grace: Offered in the Gospel
- b. The Mystery of God’s Love: Proven at the Cross
- c. The Mystery of God’s Kingdom: Made Known by the Church

2. The Mystery at work against God’s Eternal Plan...

- a. A Falling Away (apostasia) Apostasy (**2 Thessalonians 2:3a**) (**2:7**)
- b. The Mystery of Lawlessness that was already at work (**2:7**)
- c. The power behind it is working of Satan with deception and lying wonders. (**9-10**)

3. The Falling Away (apostasy) from the Faith...

- a. Paul warned the Ephesian Elders (**Acts 20:28-30**)
- b. Paul warned Timothy (**1 Timothy 4:1**)
- c. Jesus warned us (**Matthew 7:15; 24:23-25**)

So What is the Falling away? Let’s consider the 1st Church to see what changed

I. THE FIRST CHURCH WAS NOT:

A. THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

1. Some think the Roman Catholic church is the oldest church...

—and therefore it must be the first church...

- a) But the Catholic Church is not even mentioned in the Bible!

2. The First Church Began on Pentecost in Jerusalem in 33 a.d.

- a) Peter preached the gospel of Christ...
- b) He preached Repentance and baptism into Christ (Acts 2:38)
- c) The Lord Added these baptized believers to the Church (**Acts 2:41, 47**)

3. The Consolidation of Power in Rome did not begin until 3 centuries after the Church of Christ began in Jerusalem on Pentecost 33 ad.

- a) The Emperor Constantine in Rome became a Christian...
- b) He called a series of "church councils" in the 3rd century that set in motion the apostasy that centralized power in a Pope in Rome by the 6th century.
- c) It was not until 606 a.d. that the first Pope was named.
- d) Before long the Pope was called ‘Vicar of Christ’, then ‘holy father’ then Infallible!

4. Notice the Pyramid of Power in Roman Empire **[CHART]**

Notice the Pyramid of Power in the Roman Catholic Church **[CHART]**

- a) This Man-Made Power Structure is NOT Found in the NT.
- b) Nowhere in the Bible are ‘Reverends’, Cardinals, Popes, catholic priests or Vatican!
- c) This is a Falling Away from the Divine Pattern of the Church.

- d) It began by men assuming authority for themselves that was not theirs to take...
- e) electing and promoting one head elder over each congregation... then one head cardinal over a group of churches they call a diocese.
- f) A Falling away from the Divine Pattern given in the NT...
- g) In which every congregation is autonomous with only Christ as the Head of Church.
- h) And a Plurality of qualified Elders that only have oversight in each congregation
 - **EX: Do You Remember** When the Disciples were arguing over who would be greatest in the Kingdom? Jesus rebuked them! **(Matthew 20:25–28)**
 - That is how the WORLD works... But Not the Kingdom of God!
 - In the Kingdom of God—the LAST will be first—the LEAST will be the Greatest.
- **Many Think that All Churches have their origin in Roman Catholic Church —and MOST churches Do! —But Not the Lord’s Church!**

B. NOT A DENOMINATIONAL CHURCH

- 1. The First Church was not a Human Denomination...**
 - a) Denomination means: ‘a division of’
 - b) Denominations are divisions from man—and not from God.
- 2. Divisions were already beginning in the Church in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:10–13)**
 - a) They were dividing over men just like today there are divisions of men
 - b) It is estimated that there are over 30,000 denominations in the world today!
- 3. CHART: Notice the same denominational structure as the Vatican in Rome**
 - a) Power consolidated at Top: a President, a Council, Down to Congregational level.
 - b) A Denominational Industrial Complex that corrupts the NT Pattern for the Church.
- 4. CHART: This is why the structure is same [Why So Many Churches?]¹**
 - a) This is Why So Many People Think all churches came out of the Catholic Church...
 - b) The Reformation Tried reform the Catholic Church—
The Restoration wanted to restore the NT Church**
 - c) **Like King Josiah** did when they discovered the OT scrolls that had been forgotten
They read the scriptures and restored proper worship as God commanded!
- 5. The First Church Was Not a Man-Made Denomination...
It Followed Christ, not their favorite teachers**

C. NOT FOLLOWING MAN-MAN RULES OR DOCTRINES

- 1. The 1st Church followed the doctrine given by the Apostles (Acts 2:41–42)**
- 2. They were not following man-made rules or doctrines of men (Matt 15:9)**
- 3. This is what Paul is explaining (Romans 10:1-4)**
- 4. The Same Thing Happens Today—People create their own form of
righteousness and reject the righteousness provided at the cross**
 - a) They create their own counterfeit gospel... Their own form of righteousness.
 - b) Their own doctrines of men (Colossians 2:20–23)

¹ Chart ‘Why are there so many churches?’ From Michael Shank, World Video Bible School.

D. NOT A POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

1. Human Government is Ordained By God

- a) to protect law abiding citizens and punish evil doers. **(Rom 13:1)**
- b) We are to Pray for those in authority so that we may have peace
- c) so that society does not break down into anarchy **(1 Tim 2:1-2)**

2. But The Church is not a bureaucracy or department of the government

- a) It is not a PAC: Political Action Committee
- b) or NGO: Non-Governmental Organization getting money from the government.
- c) (Think of all the Fake Non-profits that siphon tax-payer money for do-gooder causes)

3. When Pilate asked if Jesus was a King... **(John 18:36)**

- a) He said: My kingdom is not of this world.

E. NOT A COUNTRY CLUB

1. Some think of the Church as a country club...

- a) Where Membership has it's privileges...
- b) Where the church exists to entertain it's members.

2. The Church is a spiritual family...

- a) We do encourage one another in the Faith
- b) We fellowship with one another and help one another

3. But the Church is not a country club **(Rom 14:17)**

II. THE FIRST CHURCH WAS:

A. IN THE MIND OF GOD FROM ETERNITY

- 1. Some think the church is a substitute for the Kingdom of Christ due to the Jewish rejection of Jesus...**
- 2. But that's NOT what the Bible says! **(Ephesians 3:9-11)****
- 3. The New Testament Church first existed in the mind of God, from eternity.**
- 4. This is what God planned from the beginning **(Ephesians 1:21)****
 - a) That we would glorify Him throughout history in the Church (3:21).

B. THE FULFILLMENT OF DIVINE PROPHECY

- 1. The Church was PROPHESED CENTURIES BEFORE by the Prophets**
 - a) **DANIEL** (Dan. 2:44; 7:13-14). **ISAIAH** (Isaiah 2:1-3).
- 2. CHART: [The Kingdom of God-Day of Pentecost]²**
 - a) Every reference to the Kingdom before Acts 2 is spoken of in Future Tense...
 - b) Every reference to the Kingdom of God after Acts 2 is Present Tense...
- 3. Acts 2 is when the Church began in Jerusalem **(Acts 2:41, 47)**.**
 - a) **Mark 9:1** some standing there who would not taste death until they saw the kingdom come with power. That power was seen on Pentecost.

² Chart: (Acts 2) Church/Kingdom established created by my dad, Tony Turner, Waupaca Church of Christ.

C. BUILT BY CHRIST

- 1. The Church belongs to Christ because He built it (Mt 16:18)**
 - a) Jesus said: “I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.
 - b) And He Did Build His Church after His crucifixion, resurrection and ascension
- 2. Jesus Purchased the Church by His Blood (Act 20:28)**
- 3. Jesus has all authority (Mt 28:18-20)**

D. CALLED THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

- 1. Just as it is called in the New Testament (Romans 16:16)**
 - a) “The churches of Christ greet you.” (“salute you” KJ, ASV)
- 2. The Church wears the name of it’s founder— (1 Corinthians 3:11)**
 - a) Why remove the name of Christ from the Church He built and died for?
- 3. Many churches have been built on man-made foundations...**
 - a) But unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it (Ps 127:1)
- 4. Jesus is the Head of His Church (Col. 1:18; Eph 1:22)**
 - a) Remember it was Diotrophese who wanted the preeminence? (3 Jn 9-10)
 - b) He refused to allow the last living apostle John into the church!
 - c) But It is JESUS who is the head of the Church... Not Diotrophese, or the pope, or Joseph Smith or any other nobody who thinks their somebody.

E. ONE IN UNITY³

- 1. The First Church was one in Unity (Eph 4:4)**
 - a) one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism;
 - b) one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.
- 2. The Unity that Jesus prayed for just before going to the cross (John 17:21)**
 - Following the NT Pattern of the Church is a Unity Movement...
 - Because We Can’t All Unite Under the Doctrines of Men...
 - But We Can Unite in the True Doctrine of Christ!

CONCLUSION:

- 1. Jesus is King of His Kingdom, the Head of His Church**
- 2. An Eternal Kingdom that cannot be destroyed**
- 3. The Kingdom He will deliver to God (1 Cor. 15:24)**

Since Jesus has ALL authority in heaven and on earth—

He dictates the terms by which we can be saved!

“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen. (Matthew 28:18-20)

Bill Turner 4/2026

³ Appreciation for the Bible tract article: The First Church, by Jonnie Edwards. Truth Magazine, Sept. 7, 2012.