

LETTER 74
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**WHEN DID THE CHURCH BEGIN?
THE DISPENSATIONAL INTERPRETATION
OF SCRIPTURE**

You ask when the church began. Here there may be a problem of semantics. It is very commonly said that the church began at Pentecost, but there is no Scriptural statement to this effect. Surely Peter and the other apostles were just as truly members of Christ's church while they listened to His teaching and enjoyed fellowship with Him both before and after His resurrection, as they were after the time when the Holy Spirit began to use them in a particular way as His instruments for reaching out to the world as a whole. There is no valid Scriptural evidence as to the exact time when the Christian church could properly be said to have begun.

The writer of Hebrews declares that it was God's will that the Old Testament saints described in Hebrews 11 "should not with out us be made perfect" (Hebrews 11:40). We are surrounded by this great cloud of witnesses (Hebrews 12:1). They, with us, are to be made perfect. No one ever was saved or ever will be saved except through the merits of what Christ did on the cross and through the faith that God provides. Thus there is a great unity to the people of God in all periods

Most Christians would agree that there was a change of dispensation at Christ's first advent. The Old Testament law looked forward to Christ. The customs prescribed for His disciples look back to His first coming and forward to His return. Thus we remember the Lord's death until He come. We no longer circumcise; we baptize. We no longer keep the Passover; we observe the Lord's Supper. Without recognition of this change of dispensation the Bible would be meaningless.

In his *Systematic Theology*, Charles Hodge describes four dispensations. In my opinion he is in error in failing to mention a