

22T01h Tough Questions? – Altar

Hello my friends. Thanks for joining me today for an @ the PUNLA coffee table.

Even if you have been a Christian for a long time, there are some things in the bible and in the traditions of the modern church that are tough to understand. I find many of these downright confusing. Some of these have troubled me for years.

We want to ask those “tough questions” and then do the research to see if we can find or develop a better understanding for these “tough questions”.

Altar...What does that word bring to mind. Well, many modern churches and church denominations have an altar. The question I was asked is why? We don't sacrifice animals anymore, so why? And what's the deal with the different colored clothes on these altars which are changed seasonally.? Now these are tough questions.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father please guide our discussion today. Help me to stay out of the way, so you can use me. If I say anything wrong, please don't let them remember my errand words but remember what you want them to hear regardless of my words. We trust you and we know you have promised the wisdom we need to understand your word in the Bible. Help us to let the Holy Spirit lead us and guide us. Bless our time together and I pray all these things in your name Lord Jesus. Amen.

Let me address the “why an altar” question first. Well, it is not in the bible or not the way we use them I should say. There are lots of times altars are mentioned in the old testament, and eventually there is an altar in the tabernacle followed by one in the temple. There are also a lot of times altar is used to talk about the altars to false gods. So not every altar is for God or about God, some if not most are against God. Both pagans and Jews had altars in their temples, on their high places and other places of worship to both God and other gods with a little “g.

In fact, the early church did not have altars or at least there is no record of them. Most early churches were home churches and did not have special furniture for worship. Actually, Jewish synagogues don't normally have altars, there is no point. The Altars in the Jewish tradition were used for animal sacrifices. No animal sacrifice, no need for an altar. The modern Reformed Jewish Synagogues do have a bimah which is a symbolic representation of the temple altar. So why do Christian churches have altars. We aren't sacrificing animals either. It appears the early Roman Catholic church instituted this tradition. Reasons for this are widely contested and I don't want to get into the debate. The Biblical support most often used is a verse from 1 Corinthians. Paul says, *“You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons.”* (1 Corinthians 10:21 NIV).

As Church tradition says, the Lord's Table that Paul is speaking about is an altar. I don't personally see this parallel but maybe that's just me. It is true that there are

references to an Altar in heaven in Revelation the sacrifice on the altar in heaven is either Jesus or martyrs or both. But that does not seem to explain why we have altars in our churches here on earth. There are plenty of reasons given about symbolism and necessities for worship but none of these are based on bible verses only people’s opinions. So, my conclusion is there is really no reason to have an altar in our Christian churches. Is it right or wrong? I don’t know. I don’t think by having an altar you can accidentally be worshiping other gods which some people of suggested. Most non-denominational churches do not have altars. It seems much of this it about church tradition rather than new testament worship of Christ among Christians, the body of Chirst. We simply don’t have any accounts in the bible of the altars in the places Christians got together to worship Jesus.

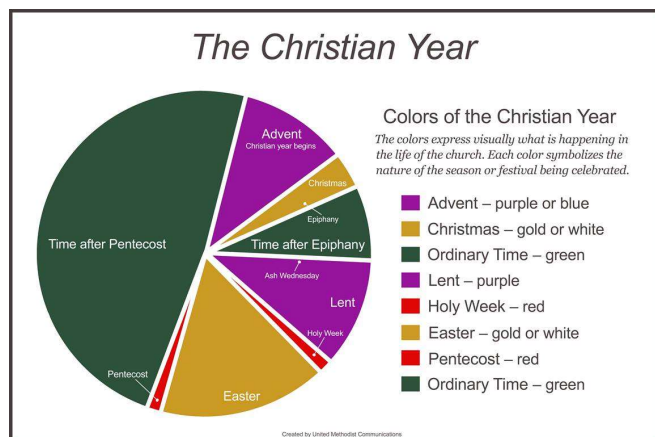
So, okay. Altar or no altar? I’ll leave that up to you. But what about the colored clothes on the altars. I grew up in the United Methodist Church and the altar cloth was changed seasonally but does the color of the cloth really matter and what is the reason for all the colors.

Believe it or not, people really care about this. The origins are most likely the early Roman Catholic Church although the Coptic and Greek orthodox churches would contest that as the origins.

I’ll attach some links on our website that show the different denomination liturgical requirements. Liturgical means about worship or things about worship. This term is not even specifically Christian. Other religions have liturgical things as well.

Here is an example from the United Methodist Church

- Christmas White or Gold
- Avent Purple or Blue
- Lent Purple
- Holy Week Red
- Easter Gold or White
- Pentecost Red
- Ordinary time Green



But different churches have different colors, although most adhere to some form of this, some have more special colors and dates, some have fewer, some have more. The colors themselves have been given special meaning and of course different denomination differ on these meanings, as well. For example

- Purple, represents royalty
- Blue symbolizes hope.
- White and gold symbolize joy and festivities.
- Red symbolizes either fire for the Holy Spirit or the blood of Christ.
- Green represents growth

And so on.



Here is another example from well, I'm not sure what denomination I took this one from. But you can see there are lots of required cloth color changes every year Lots of different colors to honor specific dates, seasons and events.

Here is a table I adapted from some information on the Vanderbilt University website showing cloth colors for different times of the year for several denominations.

	Episcopal	Lutheran	Presbyterian	Methodist	Church of Christ	Roman Catholic	Reformed	Disciples of Christ	Anglican
Advent	Violet or Royal Blue	Blue/Purple	Blue/Purple	Blue/Purple	Violet or Blue	Violet/Purple	Violet/Purple	Violet or Blue	Blue/Purple
Christmas	White or Gold	White	White	White	White or Gold	White	White	White	White
Epiphany	White	White	White	White	White or Gold		White		White
Baptism of the Lord	White	White	White				White		
After Epiphany	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Transfiguration	White	White	White	White			White		
Ash Wednesday	Violet or Unbleached Linen	Black	Purple		Black		Purple		Purple
Lent	Violet or Unbleached Linen	Purple	Red or Purple	Purple	Violet or Beige/Gray	Violet/Purple	Purple	Violet or Blue	Purple
Passion/Palm Sunday	Red	Scarlet or Purple	Red or Purple	Purple	Red	Red	White/Red		Purple
Holy Week	Red	Scarlet or Purple	Purple	Purple	Red		White/Red		Red
Maunder Thursday	Red	Scarlet	Purple		White or Gold	White	None		
Good Friday	Red or Black	Black	None or Black, Deep Scarlet		Red or Black	Red or Black	None		
Easter Season	White or Gold	White	White	White	White or Gold	White	White	White	White
Pentecost	Red	Red	Red	Red	Bright Red	Red	Red	Red	Red
Trinity Sunday	White	White	White	White	White or Gold		White		White
After Pentecost	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
All Saint's Day	White	White	White				White		White
christ the king	White	Gold	White	White	White or Gold		White		White
Festival Days	White	White/Red			White or Gold	White			White & Other
Martyr Days	Red	Red			Red				Red

You can see most of the time the different denominations agree. But some use purple when others use black or none. Gold when others use white, Red or purple, red or white and on and on and on.

I'll be honest I can't find any clear proof of when, where or how these colors became these symbols but it does appear most churches have the same general symbolisms for these colors. My guess it goes back to ancient times. We know purple and blue were signs of royalty. Jesus was draped with a purple sash to taunt him as the King of the Jews during his torture. Red was often used to represent fire or blood in many cultures outside of Christianity. Green is a common almost universal color to represent growth. White is typically used for purity and Gold well frankly I don't know. But it is clear these colors had secular meanings and the early church adopted these symbolic colors as part of the celebrations. How the clothes got on the altar, that I could not find but I'll keep looking.

Father God, thank you for giving us the resources and sources to answer these tough questions. we know you know all things. When we see how things fit

perfectly in your plan. Wow. Only with God is this possible Thank you for giving us the Holy Spirit to guide us and help us. Help us to open the Bible and look into history to answer our questions. I pray these things in your name Lord Jesus, Amen

Thank you for joining me @ the PUNLA Coffee Table today, I hope you'll join us for the rest of the series about the "Tough Questions" that we struggle with as Christians.

Altar or no Altar. Red ribbon or purple ribbon. I don't think it matters but for those of you that think it is important, then follow your conscience. But be sure, it does not impact how we follow Jesus, how we reach others for Christ or how we grow in our relationship with God. My only advice would be, know the reason your church does what it does. Don't just go along because others say you should. Own your faith and the way you worship your God. If an altar and pretty clothes of color are part of that for you, then that is good for you.

If you liked the message, please click like. And Please Subscribe to our channel and select the notification bell so you can be notified when we post new videos. Leave comments here, or our website or email me.

See you next time @ the PUNLA Coffee Table. God bless.

[United Methodist altar cloths? \(umc.org\)](http://umc.org)

[Catholic Altar Cloth Colors \(synonym.com\)](http://synonym.com)

[LITURGICAL COLORS: Presbyterian Church \(fpcofla.org\)](http://fpcofla.org)

[Colors Liturgical Seasons - The Lutheran Church](#)

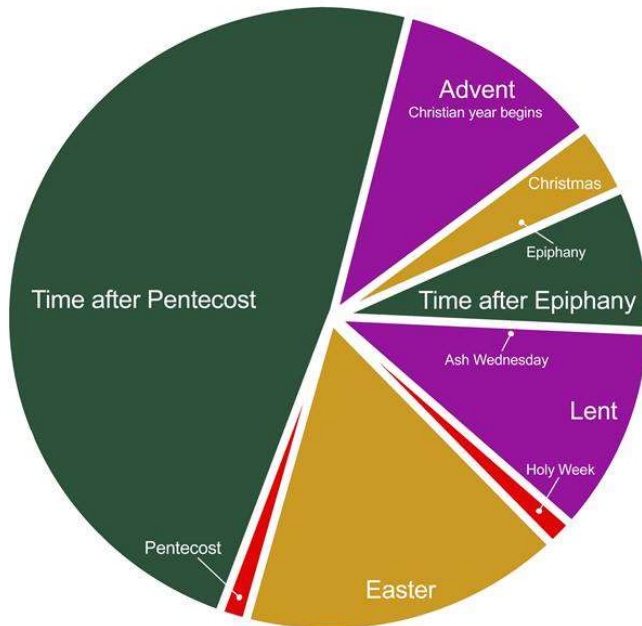
[Altar Colors - Meanings | All Saints Anglican Church](#)

[Liturgical Colors – The Episcopal Church](#)

[Liturgical colours - Wikipedia](#)

[Liturgical Colors : Revised Common Lectionary \(vanderbilt.edu\)](http://vanderbilt.edu)

The Christian Year



Colors of the Christian Year

The colors express visually what is happening in the life of the church. Each color symbolizes the nature of the season or festival being celebrated.

- Advent – purple or blue
- Christmas – gold or white
- Ordinary Time – green
- Lent – purple
- Holy Week – red
- Easter – gold or white
- Pentecost – red
- Ordinary Time – green

Created by United Methodist Communications

Colors		Season	Dates	Alternate	
Dark Blue		Advent	Dec 2-Dec 15	Purple	Blue
Pink		3rd Wk of Advent	Dec 16-Dec 22	Rose	
Dark Blue		Advent	Dec 23	Purple	Blue
Dark Blue		Christmas Eve	Dec 24	Purple	Blue
White	Gold	Christmas	Dec 25-Jan 5	White	Yellow
White	Gold	Epiphany	Jan 6	White	Yellow
Green		After Epiphany	Jan 7-Feb 2	Lt. Green	
White	Gold	Transfiguration	Feb 3-5	White	Yellow
Purple		Ash Wednesday	Feb 6	Gray	
Purple		Ash Wed/Lent	Feb 6-Mar 22	Violet	
Purple		Mundy Thursday	Mar 20	Red*	
Purple	Black	Good Friday	Mar 21	Black	
Black		Holy Saturday	Mar 22	No Colors	
White	Gold	Easter	Mar 23	White	Yellow
White	Gold	Easter tide	Mar 24-Apr 30	Red*	
White	Gold	Ascension Day	May 1	White	Yellow
White	Gold	Easter tide	May 2-May 10	Red*	
Red		Pentecost Sunday*	May 11-17	Red	Gold
White	Gold	Trinity Sunday	May 18-24	Red*	
Green		Ordinary Time	May 25-Oct 31	Lt. Green	Bronze
				Aqua	Olive
Red*		All Saints Day or Sunday	Nov 1 or next Sunday	White	Gold
Green		Ordinary Time	Nov 2-22	Lt. Green	Bronze
				Aqua	Olive
White	Gold	Christ the King	Nov 23-29	White	Yellow