

## "HOW ETERNALLY SECURE IS YOUR CHURCH FOR YOU?"



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Many people of religious inclinations are indifferent concerning the church that Christ built (based on the Apostles, Prophets, and the blood of Christ) and are divided into many different bodies, or so called churches, which only separate God's people. Therefore, it behooves us to look to the Bible for proof concerning which church Christ truly did build. The purpose of this study is to show what the Bible clearly teaches concerning the church and not set forth a mere theory, no matter how desirable it may appear.

Spiritual-minded men are conscious of a deep undercurrent of dissatisfaction within the dividing walls of the denominations which exist in the ecclesiastical world. Let us reason together with an open mind as we proceed to trace the church by using the inspired Word of God, wherein "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (2 Peter 1:21).

In the Old Testament dispensation, the house of God was an earthly structure. First we read of the tabernacle in the wilderness (Exodus 25:8), and then of the temple at Jerusalem (1 Kings 8:10). When the tabernacle in the wilderness was dedicated, God manifested Himself in a glorious manner, insomuch that Moses was not able to enter because the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle (Exodus 40:35). The same thing happened at the dedication of Solomon's temple. In 1 Kings 8:11 we read, "So that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord."

While such were the houses or tabernacles in the Old Testament, the prophets clearly predicted the coming of the Messiah, saying that He should build another house of God. Jeremiah refers to Him as a "righteous Branch and King" in Chapter 23, verse 5. The prophet Zechariah wrote, ". . . Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place . . . Even he shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both" (Zechariah 6:12-13). Then in fulfillment of these prophecies, Christ later said, "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18).

The Apostle Paul, in Hebrews the ninth chapter, affirms that the Old Testament house of God was a figure for the time then present, pointing forward to and meeting its antitype in a greater and more perfect tabernacle dedicated by Christ's own blood. In 1 Timothy 3:15 he also refers to the house of God as being the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. Peter wrote that it is a spiritual institution, composed of spiritual people: "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5).

God's redeemed saints are a building fitly framed together for a habitation of God through the Spirit. In Ephesians 2:20-22 we read: "And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

The subject of the church is introduced in the New Testament in Matthew, the sixteenth chapter. In verses 13-18 we read: "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 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; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Some believe that the church was built on Peter rather than upon Peter's confession of Christ. While it is true

that the church is built upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, as foundation stones, 1 Corinthians 10:4 clearer tells us that the Rock is Christ. Christ said that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church, meaning that the very powers of hell are not able to hold out against it or overpower it. Notice that the word it denotes only one and is not a plurality. Jesus said, "I will build my church." This implies that the church, as an institution, was yet in the future, and Christ Himself was to be the founder and builder of His church.

The time of the establishment of Christ's kingdom was predicted in the second chapter of Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar saw in a dream a great image with a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, legs of iron, and feet of iron and clay. He saw a stone cut without hands which smote the image upon his feet and broke them to pieces. The stone that smote the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth (Daniel 2:34). This great image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream represented four historically known universal kingdoms that reigned, one after the other, up to the time of Christ's birth. Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar in verse 38 of the same chapter, "Thou art the head of gold." By this we understand that the Babylonian Empire represented the head of gold. Gold, being the most precious metal, proves that the Babylonian Empire was the richest and greatest of earthly kingdoms. History proves this to be true. This kingdom arose 2,300 years before Christ. During Nebuchadnezzar's reign, the kingdom was in the height of its power and glory. Daniel said to Nebuchadnezzar: "And after thee shall arise another king inferior to thee . . ." (verse 39).

The second kingdom was the Medo-Persian which, during the reign of Belshazzar, took the Babylonian kingdom. This kingdom was represented by the breast and arms of silver. The belly and thighs of brass were represented to be a third kingdom which would bear rule over all the earth (verse 39). This was the Grecian Empire, which conquered the Medes and Persians. The legs of iron and feet, part of iron and part clay, symbolized the fourth kingdom in its strong and divided condition. This was the Roman Empire (see Daniel 2:40-43).

Daniel pinpointed the establishment of the Kingdom of God in Daniel 2:44 where he said, "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever." When Rome, the fourth kingdom, had reached the height of its glory and power and denominated all the world and Augustus Caesar was ruling (Luke 2:1), Jesus Christ appeared and established the Kingdom of God, saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15).

The stone spoken of in verses 34-35 of Daniel, Chapter 2, is the Kingdom of God. It did not come by human hands. It began with the preaching of John the Baptist and was fully set up on the day of Pentecost. Jesus said in Luke 16:16, "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth [present tense] into it."

John the Baptist, the Apostle Paul, and the disciples all preached the Kingdom of God as a present reality. John, preaching in the wilderness, said, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." In Acts 28:301 we read: "And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ. . . ." Jesus spoke these words to His disciples in Mark 9:1, "Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power."

Christ answered the Pharisees, saying, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, Lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you. He also said to Pilate, in John 18:36, "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence." In the Book of Romans, Chapter 14, we read where Paul said, "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost (verse 17).

We are translated into the Kingdom of God, or the Church of God, through a spiritual birth. In John 3:3-6 we read: "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

In John 1:11-13 we read: "He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Since this family, or church, is composed of those who have been truly born again, we can understand Paul's reference in Ephesians 5:27 to a glorious church, one that is without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. Membership in Christ's church is not acquired by an outward ceremony of church joining, but by an inward change of heart, out of godly sorrow, which causes repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

He who had promised to build His own church and complete new order of spirituality cried as He hung on

the Cross of Calvary, "It is finished." When Christ died, immediately the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom (see Matthew 27:51), and God forsook the old house, never more to dwell in temples made of hands.

A few days later, the infant church (His future house or temple being fully prepared and set in order) was dedicated by the marvelous baptism of the Holy Ghost and fire on the Day of Pentecost. The people cried out and asked Peter and the Apostles, "What shall we do?" Peter answered and said, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38). Then they that gladly received His word were baptized, and the same day there were added unto them about 3,000 souls. In verse 47 we read that the Lord added to the church daily, such as should be saved. God forgave those who repented, regenerated them by producing in them a spiritual birth, and then accepted them as members of His church.

Notice that not a single word is said about their joining the church, and nothing about Peter opening the door of the church to receive them into membership. God alone does the accepting. Any system that takes in members and keeps a membership roll is not a part of the true church, as you can see. God is the only One who really knows those who are His. In 2 Timothy 2:19 we read, "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

Man can take anyone into membership—all types of people, whether they have been born again or not. Second Corinthians 6:14 says, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" One may have true church membership in the body of Christ, His church, without ever joining or being received into any denomination, human organized society, or church by some formal rite or ceremony. Again, one may join one or more humanly-organized religious bodies and yet not have true membership in the body of Christ, His church.

In verse 17 of the same chapter we read, "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord . . . ." Salvation gives us entrance into and makes us a member of the Church of God, named after Christ's Father, who is God. Ephesians 3:15 says, "Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named." So we can see that true church membership is eternally important.

In John 17:11 we read where Christ prayed for the Father to keep "them which thou hast given me in His name, which is God"; therefore, all persons that join themselves to any other are guilty of division. In verses 21-22 we read: "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one."

For Christians to call themselves by any other name than that which the mouth of the Lord has named is dishonoring to God. Just as a married lady honors her husband by bearing his name rather than that of another, so the church honors Christ by bearing His name, whose wife she is, rather than another.

Party names are condemned by the Apostle Paul. In 1 Corinthians 3:4 we read, "For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?" Also, in Chapter 1 we read: "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (verse 10), it would be an awful reflection on the holiness of God to have many wives and separate rival families. Likewise, the multiplicity of sects and denominations are not God's church.

In the New Testament, followers of Jesus are called disciples, saints, brethren, or friends; yet we never read the words, "the disciples's church" or "the saints church," etc. The disciples honored Christ's prayer, as a church, and took the name of their Father. We see this clearly stated in both of the Corinthian letters, wherein Paul addressed "the Church of God, which is at Corinth" (1 Corinthians 1:2 and 2 Corinthians 1:1).

The only church spoken of in the Bible, regardless of the location, is the Church of God. Many Scriptures support this statement:

- In Galatians 1:13 Paul said he persecuted the "Church of God."
- In 1 Corinthians 11:12 we read of some who despised the "Church of God."
- In 1 Corinthians 10:32 we read, "Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God."
- In Acts 20:28 we read concerning the responsibility of overseers to feed the "Church of God."

A church may be called the Church of God, but if it has earthly or local headquarters, it is not truly God's church. Christ is the underlying foundation of the Church of God. Only one structure can stand on one foundation, and the Bible clearly proves that Christ built His church on Himself.

Men build churches on their own creeds, competing with Christ, without biblical authority. James tells us that there is only one lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy. All organisms that make their own laws, creeds, and systems of co-operations and disciplines, usurp the place of Christ and sit in the stead of God.

We see then that the church is the body of Christ. Of this body, Jesus Himself is the Head (see Ephesians 1:22-23), thus making Him the Head of the church. Colossians 1:18 says, "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."

In verse 24 of the same chapter we read, "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church." Thus we see that the words *body* and *church* are used interchangeably, referring to one and the same thing. Humanly-constructed systems of men have divided the ecclesiastical world into many sects, and to this extent, they stand in the way of the realization of our Lord's prayer that His disciples might all be one.

While attending Kent State University, I volunteered to take my landlord to her church. While they were testifying and enjoying each other's fellowship, I gave my testimony, and many people told me they appreciated it. Before the next service, however, the pastor evidently found out that I did not belong to their denomination and said that only those who belonged were allowed to participate. Their creed shut me out, so to speak. The different beliefs, creeds, and rituals that have been written by men have brought division. They have put up a sectarian wall wherein they refuse to let other saints worship with them unless they adhere: to their creeds. This is displeasing to God, for He wants all to be born into His church and be one, being filly framed together. Now God has set the members in His body, the church, (see 1 Corinthians 12:18) as it hath pleased him. A worker in the church is not necessarily a worker because of his or her ability, but rather, because God has called and placed him or her there. Regardless of the position, whether it be pastor, teacher, young people's leader, song leader, or choir director, these are all gifts of God.

In Romans, Chapter 12, and 1 Corinthians, Chapter 12, we read that the physical human body is clearly used to represent the body of Christ, wherein individual Christians are described as being workers together and helpers in the work of the body. Humanly speaking, our eyes, hands, and feet are all needed to make one complete workable body. This is paralleled to the spiritual body of Christ, with its several members, in which one Spirit dwells and rules so they function together in absolute harmony. The church is organized by the Lord, who sets all members in the body as it pleases Him and distributes gifts and callings by His own wisdom (see 1 Corinthians 12:27-28). Regeneration is the method by which the Spirit of God inducts or sets members in His church.

Christ organized His church. The emphasis of the entire twelfth chapter of 1 Corinthians is that men do their particular work in the church by spiritual gifts which they have received of God. The same truth is taught in the fourth chapter of Ephesians, verses 8-13. God endows the members of His body, the church, with various gifts; therefore, each one has their own particular place in the body, determined by the nature and extent of Christ's authority. Thus, the organization of the church is divine. Men may organize human organizations, but never the divine body of Christ, which is the church.

Since the church is organized by Christ, it follows that all so-called churches organized by men lack the authentic seal of God and are unscriptural schisms. In the Ephesian letter we read: "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church" (Ephesians 4:4-6; 1:22).

When man is made to be the head of a church, Christ is robbed of His place. Consequently, when Jesus ceases to be the head, that church ceases to be the church that Jesus built. There is one head; hence there can be only one body. Colossians 3:15 says, "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful."

Since we are called by Christ into one body, we must conclude that to join various bodies must be against Christ. Second Corinthians 6:14 says, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?"

In John 10:7-16 we read, "Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily; I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. . . . And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd."

In the Book of Revelation we read where Christ said, "I know thy works; behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and halt not denied my name" (Chapter 3, verse 8). We clearly see, by the Scriptures, that Christ is the door of the church, and salvation is the way of admittance. All denominations have a door, or a manner of admitting members, that is open and shut by man; hence, they are unlike the church that Jesus built, wherein no man may open or shut the door.

Many church groups are named after their founder, or in memory of some particular doctrine that characterizes it. However, it takes more than a name to make the Bible church. It takes faith in God, a born-again experience of salvation, and the Holy Ghost present in our lives, whom Jesus said would guide us into all truth. The right interpretation of a Scripture always harmonizes with all of the Word of God.

In summary, we find that the church of God is not a man-made organization. Jesus said, "I will build my church." In Isaiah's prophecy we read, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Chapter 9, verse 6). Christ is the door to the church, the head of the church, and the foundation upon which it is built.

There is no one in the church but those whose names are written in the Book of Life, which is kept in Heaven (Revelation 21:27). It is composed of all those whose robes have been washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. The church constitutes the family of God, both those present on earth and in Heaven (Ephesians 3:15). Every Christian takes the Father's name because they have been born again by a spiritual birth and, therefore, they become one of the children and family of God. Man has nothing to do with putting members into this Church—God sets each member in place as it pleases Him (1 Corinthians 12:18).

Every born-again soul is a living stone in the Church of God. The church is built upon the foundation of the prophets and apostles, with Jesus Christ Himself being the Chief Corner Stone, in which He fitly frames us together as a holy temple of the Lord. We, the family of God, or church, become a habitation of God through the Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22). Denominational church membership means nothing; it is a born-again experience that leads to eternal life.

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