

The Harvester



Preparing Souls

To Serve The Lord



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Five Truths About the Church of Christ

By Brian R. Kenyon

It was a crucial time in the earthly ministry of our Lord when He came to the “coasts of Caesarea Philippi” and asked his disciples, “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?” (Mt. 13:16). The report, “Some say thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets” was undoubtedly meant by the masses to compliment Jesus. After all, the men they named were great servants of God. However, Jesus turned to the twelve and asked specifically, “But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Mt. 16:15-16).

Peter’s confession was significant and represented a drastic difference between opinions of Jesus! The word “Christ” is simply the Greek translation of the Hebrew word transliterated “Messiah” (cf. Jn. 1:41; 4:25). Messiah refers to God’s Anointed, the chosen one of God. While John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, and the faithful prophets were great servants of God, neither one of them was the Messiah! Peter, though, acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah, God’s Anointed!

The second part of Peter’s confession is also significant—“the Son of the living God.” In Jewish culture of the day, to claim that one was the Son of God was to claim that one was God; that is, of the same nature as God. On one occasion “the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he ... said ... that God was his Father, making himself equal with God” (Jn. 5:18). After Pilate said for the third time, “I find no fault in him,” the angry Jewish mob responded, “We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God” (Jn. 19:7). For anyone else it would have been blasphemy to claim an equality with God, but Jesus truly was God in the flesh

(Jn. 1:1-3; Phil. 2:6-11), and He proved beyond any reasonable doubt, to the unbiased observer, that He was “the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Thus, Jesus responded to Peter, “Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven” (Mt. 16:17). Peter did not come to his conclusion about Jesus from the opinion of the masses—for they thought of Jesus as John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets! Rather, Peter received his information from the Father. This likely does not refer to a “still small voice,” but to the works Jesus did. Elsewhere, Jesus Himself said,

But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me. (Jn. 5:36 cf. Jn. 3:1)

Then Jesus gave a most profound statement about His church that all people must understand.

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. ¹⁹And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (Mt. 16:18-19)

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Let it be known here the church belongs to Jesus. He referred to it as “my church” and He used it in the singular. Thus, the church of Christ is not a denomination. It is the one and only body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23)! Now let us consider five truths about the church of Christ.

The Church of Christ Would Be Built Future From When Jesus Spoke These Words

Jesus used the future tense when He said, “I will build my church.” Thus, the church did not exist in the days of Abraham, Moses, or even John the Baptist. In fact, John’s death is recorded two chapters before Jesus promised to build His church (Mt. 14:3-12). While the church would be built future from when Jesus spoke these words, we will note later in this study that the church would be built in the very near future from when Jesus spoke the words recorded in Matthew 16:18-19.

The Church of Christ Is Built On the Foundation of Jesus Christ Himself

Jesus said, “upon this rock I will build my church.” Though attempts have been made to connect “this rock” with Peter, claiming that the church is built on Peter, such allegations are completely baseless. In fact, the original language clearly distinguishes “this rock” (both words feminine gender in original language) from “Peter” (masculine gender in original language). In other words, grammatically, it is impossible for the antecedent of “this” in “this rock” to be Peter! Pronouns must agree with their antecedents in gender! “This rock,” therefore, is not Peter

but the confession Peter made—“Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God”! If Jesus is not “the Christ, the Son of the living God,” then one church is as good as another, but if Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of the living God,” then the church of Christ, the church Jesus here promised to build, is the only church with God’s approval!

The Church of Christ Is Indestructible

Jesus said “the gates of hell [Hades, NKJ] shall not prevail against it.” Gates were often viewed symbolically as power. City gates in the ancient world were often flanked by bastions that could accommodate several well equipped soldiers. Thus, a city’s gates indicated its power. “Hades,” of course, refers to the realm of departed spirits and is sometimes used synonymously with death (cf. Rev. 1:18; 6:8). The point Jesus was making is that not even death—the “last enemy” (1 Cor. 15:26)—could keep Him from building His church nor prevent the church’s continuation (cf. Heb. 12:28).

The Church of Christ Is the Kingdom of God

When Jesus told Peter, “I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven,” He was using “church” (Mt. 16:18) and “kingdom” interchangeably (Mt. 16:19). The “kingdom of heaven” and the “kingdom of God,” for all practical purposes, mean exactly the same (Mt. 19:23-24). The basic definition of “kingdom” is reign, or rule. The “kingdom of God,” therefore, refers to the reign, or rule, of God. Since God has always reigned (Ps. 103:19; 145:11-13 cf. 1 Sam. 12:12), there is a sense in which He has always had a kingdom, though there have been different manifestations of it (cf. 2 Chr. 13:8). However, as the voice of one crying in the wilderness confirmed (Mt. 3:1-2), God had planned from eternity for the church of Christ to be the ultimate and final manifestation of His kingdom this side of eternity (cf. Isa. 24:23; 33:22; Dan. 2:44; Joel 2:28-31; Amos 9:11; Zeph. 3:15; Zec 14:16-17). The law which applies to the kingdom was summarized to Peter as,

[W]hatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (Mt. 16:19)

The meaning of this verse is better translated, “whatever you bind on earth *shall have been bound* in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth *shall have been loosed* in heaven” (NAS, emphasis added). In other words, Neither Peter nor the rest of the apostles (nor anyone else) has authority to bind or loose anything except what God has already bound or loosed in heaven!

The Church of Christ Is to Be Built And Perpetuated Through Human Agency

Jesus gave the “keys of the kingdom of heaven” to Peter (Mt. 16:19). Elsewhere, He gave the same binding and loosing authority to all the apostles (Mt. 18:18). Jesus chose humans, including us, to fulfill a vital role in the establishing and continuation of His kingdom, the church.

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We must take our role seriously. If the Lord relied solely on us as if we were the only individual left, would the church of Christ continue to exist after our passing?

Jesus Did Build His Church!

Having given these five truths concerning the church of Christ, let us further elaborate on two of the points; namely, Jesus' building His church future from when He spoke the words recorded in Matthew 16:18-19 and the church of Christ being the final and ultimate manifestation of God's kingdom this side of eternity. The last verse in Matthew 16 reads, "Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom" (Mt. 16:28). Thus, while Jesus said "I will build my church," clearly it would be during the lifetime of some of those who heard Him speak. We already knew that it would be during the lifetime of Peter, for Jesus gave him the "keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 16:19). Furthermore, Mark recorded Jesus saying, "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" (Mk. 9:1). Remembering that the church and the kingdom are synonymous, Jesus again indicated that the church would be built within the lifetimes of some of those who heard Him speak. In this verse, though, Jesus also said the kingdom, or church, would come "with power"!

Prior to Jesus' ascension back to the Father, following His crucifixion and resurrection, He told the apostles, "And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high" (Lk. 24:49). The Gospel ac-

ording to Luke is the only Gospel with a sequel. In that sequel, Jesus told the apostles,

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

The power about which Jesus spoke is here revealed as that of the Holy Spirit, which now brings us to Acts 2, where the apostles were gathered on the Day of Pentecost and "were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:1-13). These "tongues" were real languages, not some "Holy Ghost gibberish" so called tongue speakers claim to speak today. Peter and the rest of the apostles proved that day, from the Psalms of David, that Jesus was indeed the Christ, the Son of the living God (Acts 2:22-36). When those who realized their guilt asked, "What shall we do?," Peter told them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 2:38). Those who did were added to the church (Acts 2:41, 47). Thus, the kingdom came with power on that first Day of Pentecost following the Lord's resurrection, which was also the precise time that Jesus built His church.

Conclusion

Are we faithful members of that church today? The terms of entrance are still the same, summarized by Peter's answer, "Repent, and be baptized...in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." The Lord will still add to His church and kingdom all who "gladly receive" His word and are baptized (Acts 2:47)! 

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		Greek I (222) or III (271) (second year students)	Kenyon	3
Tuesday	8:30-12:00	Christian Evidences (224)	Stearnsman	3
	1:00-4:15	Logic (270)	Burgett	3
Wednesday	8:30-12:00	Church History (241)	Burgett	3
	1:00-4:15	First and Second Corinthians (135)	Kenyon	3
Thursday	8:30-12:00	Revelation (259)	Stearnsman	3
	1:00-4:15	Computers and Churches (287)	Wheeler	3
Friday	8:30-12:00	Preacher and His Work I (107)	Wheeler	3
	1:00-4:15	Pentateuch (164)	Elledge	3

Extension Classes				
Thursday	6:00-8:30	First and Second Corinthians (135) (Orange Street church of Christ, Auburndale)	Bauer	2.5
	7:00-9:30	Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon (136) (Wesconnett church of Christ, Jacksonville)	Scaggs	2.5

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