



## **MARKS OF A HEALTHY CHURCH**

Sermon Notes

*An Introduction to the Church, Part 2*

**Ephesians 2:19-22**

**January 13, 2013**

“<sup>19</sup> So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, <sup>21</sup> in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. <sup>22</sup> In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.” Ephesians 2:19-22

- Last week, we began a series on the Marks of Healthy New Testament Church.
- As we did so, we examined the foreshadowing of the Church in the Old Testament.
- In this examination, it was clear that the Old Testament covenant community – ethnic Israel – was established by God in order to point to a greater reality – the covenantal community that was based upon faith in Christ.

**Galatians 2:28-29:** “<sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.”

**Galatians 3:7:** “<sup>7</sup> Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. <sup>8</sup> And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” <sup>9</sup> So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.”

- My main point in last week’s sermon was to emphasize the centrality of Christ, His work, and our faith in Him.

**Galatians 3:16:** “<sup>16</sup> Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ.”

- It is critical to understand, though, that by looking to Christ, we are in no way denying the importance of the Old Testament Law. Rather, we are affirming it, but knowing that only Christ kept the Law perfectly. Therefore, **Christ is the true Israel, and we, through faith in Him, become part of that true community of God.**
- Consider the words of the prophet Hosea:

“When Israel was a child, I loved him,  
and out of Egypt I called my son.” Hosea 11:1

- Then, we read in **Matthew 2:13-15:**

“<sup>13</sup> Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” <sup>14</sup> And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt <sup>15</sup> and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.””

- It is clear from this passage, that Matthew is **equating Jesus Christ with Israel.** Indeed, Jesus is the true Israel.
- Consider, as well, the words of theologian, Gerald Bray:

“[Matthew] links the exodus to the promise of the coming Messiah (2:15) and claims that the slaughter of innocents by Herod is a fulfillment of Jeremiah’s reference to Rachel weeping for her children (2:18). Probably the only satisfactory way to understand Matthew’s hermeneutic is to realize that he virtually assimilates the historical experience of Israel as a nation to the life of Jesus – the ultimate in typological fulfillment. Like Israel, Jesus goes into the wilderness to be tested, and his twelve disciples represent the twelve tribes (Matthew 4:18ff.) who are sent to conquer the land (Matthew 10:1ff.)”

Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present*

- And so, last week we examined the foreshadowing of the Church in the Old Testament, and today we turn our attention to **the founding of the Church** in the New.

- Once again, my entire argument regarding the foreshadowing and the founding of the Church is predicated upon and hinges on the belief that Christ is the true Israel, and no one else. I believe confidently, as well, that this is the only way to preserve and protect the fulfillment of the promises of God in the Old Testament. In other words, the success of God’s promises, covenants, and plans is not dependent upon an “ethnic remnant” or a particular group of people, but upon Christ.
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- And, so, this morning we turn our attention to the **founding of the Church** in the New Testament by Christ:

**I. The Foreshadowing of the Church**

**II. The Foundation of the Church**

**III. The Function and Purpose of the Church**

**I. The Foundations of the Church in the New Testament**

- Today we will focus on two passages in the Old Testament to gain a better understanding of Christ’s founding of the Church:

**(1) The confession of Peter in Matthew 16:18, and the**

**(2) The sending of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2.**

**(1) The Confession of Peter in Matthew 16:18**

**Matthew 16:15-19:** <sup>15</sup> He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” <sup>17</sup> And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. <sup>18</sup> And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup> I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

- In this context, Peter responds on behalf of the twelve apostles.
- The interpretation of this passage hinges, in large part, to the proper interpretation of the “identity” of the “this rock” in Verse 18.
- There are, in general, four basic ways to interpret this:

**1. Jesus Christ is the “Rock” upon which the Church is built.**

- Jesus is, indeed, the Rock of Ages, and this truth is evidenced throughout Scripture.
- Augustine held to this view, as did Martin Luther, noting, “The rock is the Son of God, Jesus Christ himself, and no one else.”
- However, the context simply does not support this particular interpretation.

**2. Peter’s confession in Verse 16 (“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”) is the “Rock” upon which the Church is built (or rather, the *faith* of Peter’s confession).**

- Multiple early Church Fathers and scholars held to this view: Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa, Isidore of Pelusium, the Latin father Hilary, the Greek fathers Theodoret, Theophanes, Theophylact, and John of Damascus.
- Once again, this particular view, although certainly not in violation of Scripture, is not consistent with the text here.

**3. Peter, as evidenced by his confession, is the type of person upon which Christ will build His Church.**

- Peter will later testify to this in 1 Peter 2:5-8, calling believers in Christ “living stones.”
- This interpretation could certainly “work,” but it does not appear to be what Christ is actually stating here.

**4. Peter, as the representative apostle, is the “Rock” upon which the Church is built (Ephesians 2:20, 21; Revelation 21:14)**

- I, personally, hold to this view and believe it is the most exegetically sound.
- It is unfortunate that we, as Protestants, have reacted so strongly to the Roman Catholic abuse of this passage, that we have not truly asked ourselves the question, “What is the text truly saying, and is it compatible with the Gospel and the Scriptures?”

Robert Reymond writes, “Peter is the rock only in his office as a confessing apostle speaking the Word of God.”

- Although Peter, as the representative Apostle, is the “Rock” here (I believe), there are several points we must remember:
  1. It is important to note that the words of Jesus do not, in any way, give Peter more authority than the other apostles. Recall that Paul even corrects Peter publically in Galatians 2:11-14.
  2. Furthermore, it does not mean he is infallible, for Jesus Himself rebukes him a few verses later in Matthew 16:23: “Get behind me, Satan!”
  3. It also did not mean that Peter would occupy a unique office (i.e., the Bishop of Rome, or the Pope, as the Roman Catholics teach) or that he would be able to pass on the authority of the unique office to his successors.
  4. It is also interesting that Peter is “sent” by other apostles to Samaria in Acts 8:14, and reports back to the Jerusalem church, giving an account of his actions in Acts 11:1-18.
  5. Not only this, he only has one voice at the Council of Jerusalem, and it appears that it is actually James who has the final word (similar, perhaps, to the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court) (Acts 15:7-21).
  6. Lastly, in Matthew 18:18, Jesus extends the authority of “binding and losing” to the entire believing community (the “church” or, technically, the “assembly”).

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- In SUMMARY, regarding the foundation and establishment of the Church, there are a few essential points we must not forget:

1. **Christ is the Builder of the Church** – not Peter or any other apostle or man.
2. **Apostolic authority was of critical importance in the first century, but went away with the conclusion of the canon of Scripture.**
  - This was equally true with the Prophets of the Old Testament. These men had unique authority, sent by God to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom and to record the inspired Word of God (Scripture).
  - They also were granted the authority and ability to perform signs and wonders to authenticate their identity as Apostles and Prophets – ones sent by God, and in the case of Apostles, ones sent by Christ.

3. **The “Keys” of the Kingdom spoken of by Christ in Matthew 16, referred to [as John Gill rightly states] the “abilities to open and explain the Gospel truths.”**
  - In other words, how does the power of the Gospel shed light on our lives and convict us of sin? This is an authority that will be given, not exclusively to Peter, but to the whole “assembly” or “church” (see Matthew 18:18).
4. **The authority Christ gave the Apostles and later extended to the Church was always in direct connection with Christ’s words, the application of the revelation of Scripture, and through the power of the Holy Spirit.**
5. **The “building” that Christ is establishing is His “Temple” (Ephesians 2:20-21), and it is the outgrowth of the community of faith (the “assembly”) rooted in the Old Testament and teachings of the Patriarchs.**

“<sup>19</sup> So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, <sup>21</sup> in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. <sup>22</sup> In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.” Ephesians 2:19-22

- Therefore, the truth of the [twelve] apostles serving as the foundation upon which the church is built **demonstrates the continuity between the Old and the New Testaments.** Just as the twelve tribes of Israel were the foundation of the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, so now the twelve apostles are the foundation upon which the household of God (or, more precisely, the “temple”) is being built. Once again, **all of this is true because of the work of Christ and His fulfillment of all that was written in the Old Testament.**

## 2. The sending of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2.

“<sup>1</sup> When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup> And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. <sup>4</sup> And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. <sup>5</sup> Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. <sup>6</sup> And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. <sup>7</sup> And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? <sup>8</sup> And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? <sup>9</sup> Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup> Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, <sup>11</sup> both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.”

Acts 2:1-11

- This great passage of Scripture signifies several critical truths regarding the founding of the Church.

### **1. It occurred during the Old Testament Feast of Weeks (Pentecost).**

- Pentecost marked the completion of four great feasts/festivals that began at Passover (the death of Christ):
  - **Passover** (the death of the Passover Lamb)
  - **The Feast of Unleavened Bread** (one week starting with the day of Passover, symbolizing the removal of sin by Christ at Passover)
  - **The Feast of Firstfruits** (representing the presentation of the resurrected Christ on the day after the Sabbath during the Feast of Unleavened Bread).
  - **The Feast of Pentecost / the Feast of Weeks** (fifty days from the Sabbath of Unleavened Bread)

“What tied the Passover to Pentecost was the presentation of a sheaf before the Lord on the first day after Passover. This sheaf was taken from the first harvest of spring which was the winter barley (Lev. 23:10 ff.). The Feast of Weeks is to occur seven weeks (counted from the day after the Sabbath, cf. Lev. 23:15-16) or fifty days after the Sabbath, hence the name “Pentecost” meaning fiftieth. Pentecost, or the Feast of Weeks or ingathering, is organically connected to and brings to completion the Feast of Unleavened Bread. We must keep this in mind as we consider the typology and significance of the wave-sheaf and Pentecost... The feast of weeks was a completion of the harvest that began with the barley wave-sheaf seven weeks earlier. The wave-sheaf is the beginning of the harvest that occurs during the day of first fruits (Nu. 28:26) or “the Feast of Harvest” (Ex. 23:16). The resurrection of Christ leads directly to the great harvest of souls on the day of Pentecost.”

Brian Schwertly

- Pentecost is another fulfillment of the Old Testament – the beginning of the great harvest of souls – by Christ Himself.

### **2. It marked the culmination of the work of Jesus Christ (His Incarnation, Life, Death, Burial, Resurrection, Ascension, Coronation, and Intercession).**

- Pentecost marks the crowning achievement of Christ’s finished work.
- It is important that we see that at Pentecost, Christ baptizes His people with / in the Holy Spirit.

“At the Jordan, the Spirit was given to Jesus, by the Father (Luke 3:22), as endowment for the messianic task before him, in order that he might accomplish the salvation of the church; at Pentecost, the Spirit, received by Jesus, from the Father, as reward for the redemptive work finished and behind him, was given by him to the church as the (promised) gift (of the Father). The fully Trinitarian complexion of Pentecost is plain.”

Richard Gaffin,

*Perspectives on Pentecost: New Testament Teachings on the Gift of the Holy Spirit*

### **3. It began in Jerusalem.**

- In other words, its roots were Jewish.
- Once again, viewing the covenant people of God through solely a Christological perspective is not an abandonment or replacement of ethnic Israel, it is a resurrection and expansion of it.
- This is why the church began in Jerusalem – it was the heart of the Jewish world, the home of the Temple and the capital of Judea.

Isaiah 11:1-2:

<sup>1</sup> There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

<sup>2</sup> And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

- The “stump” of the tree – the stump of Jesse – was assumed dead. But through Christ, it now lives.
- This is certainly consistent with the truth of Paul’s writings in Romans 11:

“<sup>17</sup> But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, <sup>24</sup> For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree.”

- Christ is the nourishing root of the olive tree!

### **4. It was clear it would spread.**

- This marks the beginning of the fulfillment of Acts 1:8: “<sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”
- Like a well-rooted tree, the Body of Christ will thrive and flourish.

### **5. It unified the covenant people of God, not through ethnicity or nationality, but through the working of Christ.**

- Notice the great diversity in language in Acts 2.



- Yet, with the diversity in language, because of the descending of the Holy Spirit, there is great unity and understanding.
- This reality is also tied back to the Old Testament, as it represents the reversal of the curse of Babel.
  - Before the incident at Babel, the Scriptures tell us in Genesis 11, “Now the whole earth had one language and the same words.”
  - Yet, because of the judgment of God on the people of Babel, He confused their languages that they could not understand one another.
  - However, at Pentecost, the people have many languages, but God makes them to understand.
  - This further underscores and foreshadows the great diversity and expanse of the Body of Christ.

**6. It is the opportunity for Peter to exercise the “keys of the Kingdom.” This also provides believers, even today, with an apostolic model as to how to exercise biblical authority.**

- Finally, we see that this scene demonstrates the truthfulness of Christ’s words to the Apostle Peter in Matthew 16.
- Here, Peter stands and begins to explain what is occurring at Pentecost, using the Scriptures as the basis of understanding.

<sup>14</sup> But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words.

<sup>32</sup> This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. <sup>33</sup> Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.

<sup>36</sup> Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” Acts 2:14, 32-33, 36

- Peter is here using the Keys of the Kingdom to unlock the mysteries of the gospel to the hearers in Jerusalem at Pentecost.
- **These are the same “Keys of the Kingdom” that the church possess today.**

**III. The Function and Purpose of the Church**

- Finally, now that we have seen the foreshadowing of the Church in the Old Testament and the establishment of the Church by Christ in the New, the question becomes for us today, what is our function and purpose?

- To put it another way, what are the “marks” or the characteristics, biblically, of a healthy New Testament Church?
- The answer to this central question will be the focus of our Bible Study time today and the sermons from the pulpit in the coming weeks.
- **May Christ be glorified in and through His Church!**