

The Church of Christ

Matthew 16:18

“... on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”

The Greek word here translated *church* (*ekklesia*) means “assembly, congregation”. Scriptures speak of both *many churches* of Christ (e.g., Romans 16:16) – congregations of professing believers in various places, and of the *single church* of Christ (as in the present text). We here consider the latter – the one church of Jesus Christ. And we will consider what He is here said to be to her: 1. her owner and master; 2. her founder and builder; 3. her rock and foundation; 4. her preserver.

I. Christ is the owner and master of His church: He calls it “My church”.

1. This is “God’s congregation, which You have purchased of old” (Psalm 74:2) – from eternity, through the blood of “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8).

2. This is “the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28) – for it was purchased by the blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18f; Revelation 5:9), and Christ is God (John 1:1, et.al.).

3. This is “the church, which is [Christ’s] body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Ephesians 1:22f – cp. “His body, which is the church” in Colossians 1:24). Christ has only one such body (Romans 12:5; Ephesians 4:4; Colossians 3:15). “And He is the head of the body, the church, ... that in all things He may have the preeminence” (Colossians 1:18). All His saints are members of His church/body (1 Corinthians 12:12-27), for all in Him are members of it.

4. This is the church whose ministers were appointed by God (1 Corinthians 12:28): “And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers” – “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ ...” (Ephesians 4:11-16). Other churches have officers appointed by others.

5. This is “the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven” (Hebrews 12:23) – “those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life” (Revelation 21:27).

6. This is the “congregation of the righteous” (Psalm 1:5), the “assembly of the upright” (111:1). It is comprised of all who are righteous through Christ their Righteousness,

and upright in Him.

7. This is “the house of God, which is the church of the living God” (1 Timothy 3:15) – “whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end” (Hebrews 3:6). (See also “building” and “household” in Ephesians 2:19-22.)

8. This “church of the living God” is “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). This “truth” is Jesus Christ (John 14:6). This “ground” makes stable. This “pillar” upholds Christ in and to the world. Christ’s church stably upholds the truth regarding “the mystery of godliness” (1 Timothy 3:16).

9. This “church” is comprised of Christ’s “brethren” (Psalm 22:22 / Hebrews 2:12): He declares to His Father, “I will declare Your name to my *brethren*; in the midst of the *church* [“great assembly” in Psalm 22:25] I will sing praise to You.”

10. This church is Christ’s wife. Holy Scriptures speak of this in various texts:

First, He betrothed her to Himself and purposed her salvation (Hosea 2:19f): “I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in lovingkindness and mercy; I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know Jehovah.”

Second, He identified Himself to her as both her Maker and God (Isaiah 54:5): “your Maker is your husband, Jehovah of hosts is His name.”

Third, the “church” is described as Christ’s “wife” in Ephesians 5:22-32.

- Christ is her Head (or Husband) and Savior (v.23).
- She is subject to Him as His wife (v.24).
- “Christ also loved the church” so much that He “gave Himself for her” in His substitutionary death for her sins and salvation (vv.25f).
- Her members are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones, and one with Him, as are a husband and wife (vv.30-32).
- He will present her to Himself as “a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but ... holy and without blemish” (v.27).

Fourth, He and she will be wed at “the marriage of the Lamb” (Revelation 19:7-9) – following His return to earth.

Fifth, she in eternity will be “the Lamb’s wife” – “the great city, the holy Jerusalem, ... having the glory of God” (Revelation 21:9-11ff).

II. Christ is the founder and builder of His church: He here says “I will build My church.”

1. Christ builds this church in fulfillment of prophecy

(Zechariah 6:12f): “Thus says Jehovah of hosts, saying: ‘Behold, the Man whose name is the *Branch*! From His place He shall branch out, and He shall build the temple of Jehovah; yes, He shall build the temple of Jehovah. He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule on His throne; so He shall be a priest on His throne.’”

Christ is the God-Man building the temple in which He is enthroned as the Priest-King, and in which He alone is to be worshipped and receive all the glory. This is *His* church.

2. Christ is yet building His church: He said “I *will* build My church” – employing a verb of the future tense. Members in it are told that “you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5).

3. “And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47).

III. *Christ is the rock and foundation of His church:* He referred to Himself when He declared “*on this rock* I will build My church.”

1. This “rock” is not Peter, as some aver. This they claim because of the similarities between the Greek words here translated “Peter” (*petros*) and “rock” (*petra*). But “*petra* denotes ‘a mass of rock,’ as distinct from *petros*, ‘a detached stone or boulder,’ or a stone that might be thrown or easily moved” (*Vine’s Complete Dictionary of New Testament Words*). A mere mortal is not a sufficient rock upon which the church of Christ should be built. However, other churches are indeed built on men.

2. Rather, this “rock” is Jesus Himself – the “Son of Man” of whom Peter rightly confessed “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (vv.15-17, which immediately precede our present text).

3. Jesus Christ is preeminently the “wise man who built his house on the rock [*petra*]” (Matthew 7:24f). (Remember that His “house” is His “church” in 1 Timothy 3:15.) Christ’s “house” will never fall, “for it was founded on the rock [*petra*]” (Matthew 7:25), and Jesus Christ is this Rock. Churches built upon men are houses built by foolish men on the sand, which fall (Matthew 7:26f).

4. Furthermore, Christ is the “corner stone” and “foundation” of His church.

- He is the “precious corner stone” and “sure foundation” laid by Jehovah (Isaiah 28:16) – although He is rejected by men and manmade religion (Psalm 118:22f / Matthew 21:42).

- He is “the foundation of the apostles [of the New Testament] and prophets [of the Old Testament]” on which He is building His house comprised of His people (Ephesians 2:19-22; cp. 1 Peter 2:4-8).

- “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:11).

IV. *Christ is the preserver of His church:* He assured His church that “the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” Therefore, the church of Christ is never in need of a mortal reformer, restorer, reorganizer, or reviver.

1. Christ’s church will never die. The English word *hell* in the King James Version is *Hades* in the Greek text, and corresponds to *Sheol* in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament. It is the place to which departed souls went at death (including saints prior to Christ’s resurrection). These “gates of *Hades*” correspond to the “gates of *Sheol*” (Job 17:16; Isaiah 38:10). Through them souls that departed this earthly life entered the realm of death.

Christ’s church will never enter the “gates of Hades/Sheol”, for it will never die or cease from the earth. Christ has the power to prevent His church from entering the gates of Hades and Death because He assures her that “I have the keys of Hades [the place] and of Death [the state]” (Revelation 1:18).

2. Christ’s church will never be conquered. The verb “prevail” suggests a conflict. Many attempts have been made to conquer Christ’s church (e.g., Acts 8:1, 3; 12:1; Galatians 1:13). But they all have failed, and she yet remains.

Here the “gates of Hades” may represent Satan and his hellish forces emerging from the gates of his kingdom at the end of this age to conquer Christ’s church. Indeed, that is the image set forth in Revelation 20:7-9. But Satan and his forces will not prevail against Christ’s church because Christ will come to save her.

3. Christ’s church will forever praise the God who preserves her (Ephesians 3:20f): “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory *in the church* by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”

Nations oppose Christ (Psalm 2:1-3). Religions give lip-service to Him (Isaiah 29:13 / Matthew 15:8). But His church exalts Him.

Friend, how is it with you? Are you among the wicked opposing Christ? or among the religious serving Him with only their lips? or through faith in Christ in the church worshipping and exalting Him?