

I Will Build My Church

The Purpose and Characteristics of Christ's Church

January 5, 2020

Introduction

Ephesians 5:25-27

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,

26 so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,

27 that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.

To the Glory of God

Now God has laid upon my heart to take a few weeks of this new year to examine what the Bible says about the "Church". For example, just what *is* the "Church"? What is the *Purpose* of Christ's Church? Why didn't the superior Revelation of the New Covenant involve just *individual believers*? Why does God tell believers in the risen Savior to serve Him *together*, sing *together*, weep *together*, rejoice *together*, struggle *together*, and worship *together*? What are all the "One Another" Passages in the Bible really saying? What does a real, biblical Church look like? What are the Qualifications and Characteristics of biblical Church Leadership? Why does the Bible teach formal Church Membership? And what is "Church Discipline" and how do we engage in it?

Today, most people have developed a very *individualistic* lifestyle. We come and go as we please with little or no accountability to other people. Studying and learning from History seems like a complete waste of time, and so, there is little or no connection with people and events of the past. For example, we can live on a street for many years and never even know the names of our neighbors. People are infinitely more migrant than ever before. And Qualities like "Faithfulness" and "Stability" and "Accountability" are at an all-time low. And, here in America, we greatly *value* that "Individualism". We praise people, who

“march to the beat of a different drummer”. And we see little or no value in becoming part of something larger and more important than ourselves.

So, how does the Christian Church thrive in a culture like that? Only by becoming separate, distinct, and different (Holy) from the world can the Church exist. And so, unlike the “Rugged Individualism” that is so highly praised in this country, the “name of the game” in Christianity is *Conformity* and *Submission*. So, for example, the Bible teaches that we are to become...

Romans 8:29b

... conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;

... and individual members of the Church are to...

Hebrews 13:17

Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

... and then we are to become so close to each other, so united, so devoted to each other that we can ...

James 5:16b

... confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed.

The unique Love and Devotion and Unity among the members of the Church is so unlike the world that it is described repeatedly in the Bible as something called “one mind”.

The Acts 1:14

These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer,

The Acts 2:44-47

And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they *began* selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in

the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Philippians 1:27

Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;

... and so, there is a “togetherness” in the Christian Church that simply doesn’t exist anywhere else. The individual members of Christ’s Church are also “**devoted to one another**” (**Romans 12:10**) with a type of Love that staggers the unbelieving world. In fact, Jesus said this *unique* kind of Love actually *defines* the Church, and sets it apart from every other Institution on earth.

John 13:35

By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

When Jesus lived, and then died, and then rose again, He did something that changed the course of human History and that transcends both time and culture. Out from “Who Jesus is” and “What Jesus did” came forth a “Body”, a living, breathing *Organism*, that is comprised of people from every walk of life, every economic situation, every educational level, from every nation, tongue, and tribe (who otherwise would have no reason to gather together) who are all united together under the very *same* Banner, who all eat the *same* spiritual Food (the Holy Bible), who are all empowered by the *same* Comforter (God the Holy Spirit), and who live their lives to the Glory of the *same* God/Man, Jesus, the Christ.

Now, here in **Ephesians 5**, this Passage tells us several things:

- Jesus loves His Church
- Jesus “**gave Himself up**” for His Church
- Jesus “**gave Himself up**” for His Church *so that* He might “**sanctify Her**”

- Jesus is able to sanctify His Church because He has already cleansed Her by (through) a procedure described as **“the washing of water with the Word”**
- Jesus did (and is doing) all this so that He will be able to **“present to Himself the Church”** when He comes back
- The Way Jesus will present the Church to Himself is **“in all Her Glory, having neither spot of wrinkle or any such thing, but that she would be Holy and Blameless”**
- Jesus' Love for His Church is the Example that Husbands are to strive to emulate to their Wives
- Marriage is a tangible, visible, earthly, and temporary Sign of the Mystery of the Covenant between Jesus and His Church

Now, I would suggest to you that all of the things that God “carried along” the Apostle Paul to write down after the middle of verse 25 is really nothing more nor less than what Jesus' Love for His Church looks like. In other words, beginning with the phrase, **“and gave Himself up for her”** in verse 25, all the way down to Jesus presenting this glorious and purified Church to Himself in verse 27, Paul is telling us what it means for Jesus to love His Church.

So, this Love goes *way beyond* some degree of Affection, or some level of Care and Concern. Jesus' Love for His Church goes from Him giving Himself up for Her, all the way down to Him *making sure* that His Church is both Holy and Pure.

So, Jesus is not an “absentee Landlord”. No, Jesus is *fully* engaged in the Creation, and Building, and Expanding, and Sustaining of His Church, for whom He gave His Life. He is *intimately* involved in every aspect of every part of His Body. And He loves Her with a white-hot Passion that can never be diminished. And that means that the Lord Christ is *determined* to do *whatever* needs to be done, *for as long as it needs to be done*, so that He is able to present the Gift of a holy and blameless Church to Himself when He comes back.

And since Jesus is God, and since God is Omnipotent and Almighty and Effectual and Sovereign, this Plan, this Goal of presenting a holy and blameless Church to Himself when He comes back (as the crowning Achievement of all that He said and did), WILL NOT FAIL! It WILL happen. This WILL come to pass. Jesus is actually promising to do all that He said He will do, *so that* He will be

able to magnify the Glory of His Grace when He comes back by presenting to Himself the Church, in all Her Glory!

Now if we were talking about some inanimate object like a wooden carving or a statue, this would not be very hard. Almost *anybody* could design and then fashion a statue or a painting or an icon or a piece of furniture so that it would illustrate the Importance of the one who made it. But here, Jesus is not talking about an inanimate object. He isn't talking about a Concept, or an Issue, or even a Doctrine. So, the Doctrine of the Church (Ecclesiology) is NOT some Truth that we are to simply believe. Yes, it is true. And, yes, we are to believe it. But the Church is also something that is happening right before our eyes. It is living and breathing and expanding and growing and the visible Church on the earth is either becoming more and more submissive to her Lord (and thus more pleasing to Him), or she is sticking her fist in Jesus' Face and rebelling against Him. So, the Church of Jesus is something that believers are supposed to be a *part of*, and experience, *personally*.

Because, here, the Apostle Paul was *not* talking about the Church *buildings*, or the many *accomplishments* and *exploits* that the Church has been engaged in for over 2,000 years. No, Paul was speaking infallibly, on God's behalf, to say that Jesus is going to do all of this with His Church, His people, His Body! In other words, the part here that talks about the Church **“in all her Glory having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless”** is talking about *us*!

And so, God's people, being made Holy and Pure, by what God alone does for us, is what will magnify the Glory of God's Grace *better* than anything else. Us, having neither spot or wrinkle or any such thing, by and through what God alone has done *for* us and *in* us, will illustrate, or display, or reveal the Worth, and the Value, and the Importance of God's Grace to the world, better than anything else! Let me say this one more way: Jesus loving us, by sanctifying us and washing us and purifying us and by making us Holy, so when He comes back we will be in a position to be the Gift that He will present to Himself, will prove to the world, better than anything else, just how Wonderful and Glorious and Beautiful and Magnificent Jesus is!

So, Jesus loving His Church, by doing all of the other things, is what will CAUSE us to be made white and clean and pure. And us

being transformed into people like that will glorify God more thoroughly than anything else He has done.

Another way of looking at this is to comprehend that Jesus presenting a glorious and holy and pure Church to Himself is the *ultimate* Delight of God, because it displays His Importance, *ultimately!* And that means that Jesus loving His Church, to the degree that we become people like this, is the *primary* Goal of Salvation!

So, Salvation is NOT merely that we escape Hell. It is NOT merely that we have Eternal Life. Salvation is NOT merely that we can walk on streets of gold and go through pearly gates and be re-united with loved ones who have gone before us. Thanks be to God we WILL escape the damnation of Hell! Praise God that we WILL never die! And how wonderful it is that we will walk on streets of gold and go through the pearly gates, and that we WILL be re-united with our loved ones who were saved! So, I'm not, in any way, *minimizing* any of those things.

But, *ultimately*, Salvation is about displaying, or revealing, or showing, or proving the ultimate Worth and Value and Importance of God and His Grace. And that is *best* carried out by Jesus' Church being *transformed* into all the things that Paul talks about here. And when the Glory of God's Grace is both seen and valued, then God Himself will look utterly magnificent, *in, by, and through* Jesus Christ!

And this is why I want to begin this new year by taking some time to examine all that the Bible teaches about "*The Church*". And in this Sermon Series, I hope to find some Answers to these Questions:

- ✓ Why did God create the Church? Why not just have individual believers?
- ✓ What does a *real* Church look like? What are the Characteristics of a *biblical* Church?
- ✓ What does biblical Church *Leadership* look like?
- ✓ Should the Church have *formal* Membership?
- ✓ *How* should we think about all the *excesses* and *abuses* throughout Church History? And what about the abuses and excesses that are going on now?
- ✓ *Why* are there so many different Denominations?
- ✓ *Why* does God command us to Sing, Pray, Love, Learn, Weep, Rejoice, and Serve, *together*?

- ✓ *How* can the Church become “spotless” while the individuals in the Church are not?

Now this year marks approximately 2,024 years since the Resurrection.¹ So, we are about twenty-four years into the 3rd Millenia of what is called the “*Age of the Church*”, or the “*Church Age*”, or simply “*Church History*”. And this refers to that long, extended period of time between the first and second Advent, between the *first* Coming of Jesus to this earth and His *second* Coming. So, Church History looks something like this:

AD 1-AD 1000: the *first* Millenia

AD 1,001-2000: the *second* Millenia

AD 2001-3000: the *third* Millenia²

... where the initials, “AD” (*Latin: Anno- Domini*), mean: “*in the Year of the Lord*”, signifying so many years AFTER the Resurrection of Jesus. So, every “good” or “bad” thing that the people of the Church did, every correct Teaching, every Heresy that was defeated, every biblical Doctrine developed, and every abuse and excess that was contrary to the Scriptures, from AD1 until AD1000, happened in the *first* Millenia. Everything they did from AD1001 and AD2000 occurred in the *second* Millenia, and everything from AD2001 until now has been or will be done in the *third* Millenia.

Sadly, when many Protestants talk about Church History, they go from the Apostles right to Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation of the 16th Century. But that just skips over many, many godly and precious saints, who preached the Truth, and who lived lives of purity and holiness for 1,500 years *before* Luther was ever born. And that’s just wrong. The Reality is that the Church of Jesus only has one History. And that History involves both amazingly glorious and horrifically frightening people and deeds. But that is *our* History, and we should know it, and either *emulate* its victories, or *learn* from its failures.

But the point I am making is that both Christianity and the Church aren’t new. And to get an idea of the age of the Church, we

¹ Assuming that Jesus was born in 4BC.

² There is some confusion that calendar dates begin with the number “1” rather than “0”.

might look at our own country. The United States of America *declared* their Independence from Great Britain on July 4, 1776, by fifty-six men signing the Declaration of Independence. But the Constitution (which tells us how to operate our country) wasn't ratified until June 21, 1788, some twelve years later. And based on *that* date, this past June, this country celebrated 231 years of existence.

But most of the time when we ponder George Washington and Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, we usually think of "ancient history", because, after all, more than *two* long Centuries have transpired since those men were used by God to create this "Experiment with Democracy". Yet, by comparison, the Church of Jesus has been on the earth for over *twenty* Centuries! In other words, the Church has been on the earth for *ten times longer* than this nation has existed! And while the entire 231 years of our country's existence has to do with only the geographical real estate that extends from New York to Los Angeles and from Tacoma to Miami, the overwhelming majority of time that the Church has existed has been in nations *other* than America. So, *nothing* in the Bible, and *nothing* in the first 1800 or so years of Church history have anything to do with the United States and our way of life. And that may seem very strange and distant to us.

Those of us who have never known anything but "American Christianity" need to know that places like Syria and Antioch and Turkey and northern Africa were the nations where the *majority* of the earthshaking theological battles of the Church were fought. And cities like Jerusalem, and Nicaea, and Chalcedon, and Constantinople saw the Leaders of the Church hammer out most of the foundational Doctrines that we hold dear today.

But then we have to recognize that the Bible isn't new either. The 66 Books of the Bible have been collected together, put into print, and circulated around the world now for about 1,600 years.³ And then we have to also recognize that we are NOT the first generation of believers who are trying to "get the Gospel right". There is not a single verse or Passage in the Bible that has not been examined, and studied, and analyzed, and preached, and taught, and obeyed (and disobeyed) by many tens of millions of people for 2,024 years!

³ The usually accepted date for the completion of the "Canon of Scripture" is AD405. That date is when a final list of the "accepted Books" was completed. But all of the Books were in print and were being used from the very beginning of the Church. The date of AD405 is when all the Books were compiled into one location- what we call our "Bibles" today.

But, because Christianity and the Church have become so “Americanized”, and because of real shallow, and often real bad Teaching abounds in our day, I see the need to lead this Church to go on a “journey”. And that journey will be to *re-discover* “Real, Genuine, Orthodox, Historical, Biblical Christianity.” Another way of understanding why we are on this “journey” is to comprehend what the half-brother of Jesus, a man named “Jude”, wrote about this in **Jude 3:**

Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.

Now this verse tells us that, *initially*, Jude felt led to write his inspired Book about a subject that he called the “Common Salvation”. So, the Book of Jude was going to be about what all truly saved people have in common with each other. But as he was beginning to write his Book, God the Holy Spirit carried him along to write about an entirely different subject, something that he called:

The “Once for all handed down to the saints” Faith.

... *that* Faith, the *Christian* Faith. And that tells us that the “Christian Faith” is several things:

- It was not “invented” by religious geniuses. It was “handed down”.
- It was “handed down” just *one* time.
- It was “handed down one time” *to the saints*.

... which is *why* the Apostle Paul wrote this in **Ephesians 4:4-6:**

There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

So, Jesus Christ, the one, single Lord, established one single Religion, one true Church, and one Faith that was “handed down to the saints” a single time. And every genuine believer, every soul who has truly experienced the Miracle of the New Birth and has been *spiritually*

“baptized” into the one single Body (by a sovereign Act of God), is a part of that very *same* Church to which the Christian Faith was given.

So, in order for him to be in submission to the Authority of the third Person of the Trinity, Jude *changed* the subject of his Book. And he wrote the next twenty-two verses about the *dangers* to the “Faith” that was “once for all handed down to the saints”.

Now there are approximately 8,000 different religions and human philosophies on earth today. And yet, about 7,999 (99.9%) all teach the same thing:

Humans have to do something to become “Right” with God.

... and the only areas where these Man-made religions and human philosophies differ is in what they demand from their followers to become “saved”. For example, some false and Man-made religions teach that people must partaking of the Sacraments to be saved⁴ (Sacerdotal Regeneration). Others teach that being baptized⁵ (Baptismal Regeneration), or speaking in tongues is what saves them.⁶ (Glossolalia). Still other false religions teach that people must sacrifice their children⁷, or fly airplanes through buildings⁸. So, the overwhelming majority of all religions in the world, both now and throughout all of human history, teach the very *same* thing: People become “Right with God” by what they “do” for themselves.

Only true, genuine, biblical Christianity stands apart. And Christianity is unique among all the religions of the world because the “once handed down to the saints” Faith teaches that lost people are made “Right with God” by “*believing*”, by “*trusting*”, and by “*confessing*”, and that all of our desire and ability to believe and trust and confess comes from God that we are gracious gifted with both the desire and the ability to believe and trust and confess by a sovereign Act of God in miraculously transforming our fallen nature. And so, in reality, all throughout the world there are only two religions:

⁴ **Roman Catholicism**; “Partaking of the Eucharist is necessary for Salvation”; http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p2s2c1a3.htm; “Baptism is necessary for salvation for those to whom the Gospel has been proclaimed and who have had the possibility of asking for this sacrament” (Catechism of the Catholic Church; Paragraph 1257).

⁵ **The Church of Christ**; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baptismal_regeneration

⁶ **The United Pentecostal Church**; <https://www.upci.org/about/our-beliefs>

⁷ **The Babylonian Mystery Religions**

⁸ **Islam** teaches that whoever dies in the pursuit of a legally declared Jihad will immediately enter into Heaven; Microsoft Word - D6E55F5.doc

1. Christianity
2. Doctrines of Demons

Christianity teaches that wicked rebels are both forgiven and made “just as Righteous as God Himself is Righteous” by believing in Jesus, *personally*, and by trusting that what Jesus alone did for us was *sufficient* for God to pardon us and make us clean. And so, by first believing, and then by trusting, and then by confessing two areas of the Gospel:

1. That Jesus is God Almighty in human flesh.
2. That God raised Jesus from the dead.

... we are “saved”; we are “rescued” from all of God’s Wrath that was against us because we are guilty sinners.

So, Christianity alone and singularly teaches that sinners are made white by what we *believe in*, by Who and what we *trust in*, and by what we *confess*, and NOT by what we “do”. And all of the Good Deeds that believers carry out are merely human responses to the mighty and sovereign Work that God has done in them. So, what we believe in changes who we “are”. And who we are changed what we “do”. And the Christian Church is the only entity on earth that teaches this, and Christians are the only people who believe it.

But the only way we can know any of this is by very carefully examining every word of every verse of every Book of the Bible so we can ask and answer three Questions:

1. What does that Verse or Passage actually *say*?
2. What does that Verse or Passage *mean* by what it says?
3. What does Obedience to that Verse or Passage look like in the 21st Century?

... and this effort is called “Developing a Biblical Theology”. It is systematically developing a “Biblical Orthodoxy” (Right/Correct Belief). It is obeying Jude and...

... Contend(ing) earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.

... so, we can be pleasing to the Lord. Dear friends, the only way to prove that our Salvation is genuine is for us to love God. And the only way we have to prove our love for Jesus is to obey what He said. And the only way we can possibly obey what Jesus said is to understand what He expects (and demands) from us in the pages of the Holy Bible. Other than that, we are just guessing.

But we also have to understand that the Goal of Christianity is NOT for us all to become "Academics". The Goal of God in Salvation is also NOT for us all to be "Intellectuals". No, God's Goal in Salvation is to magnify the Glory of His Grace by so radically changing unworthy sinners (by what He alone does for us) that we attain the highest and the best and the ultimate fulfillment of our own Joy in God being glorified.

You see, reluctant followers do NOT magnify God's Greatness. Those who have one foot in the world and the other one in the Church prove, by their indecisiveness, that Jesus is really NOT that big of a deal to them. And those who "serve God" out of a sense of Duty or Obligation are NOT obeying the Bible where Jesus said:

John 15:11

These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and *that* your joy may be made full.

The infinite Worth and Value of the one, true, and living God CANNOT be displayed by people who do NOT *delight* themselves in Him. Only by us attaining to the fullness of Joy in God alone being magnified do we do justice to the infinite Majesty of our great God. Only when "Who God is" and "what God has done" fuels the highest degree of our own Happiness can we truly say that Jesus is the "Treasure of the Universe".

So, the Goal of God in Salvation, and in the building and sustaining of His Church, is for people, born in the Sin of Adam, to become "satisfied lovers" and "glad followers" of Jesus, the Christ. Because, *that* magnifies God's Grace better than anything else. And when people, from every nation, and every tribe, and every language,

and every culture, and every custom gather together to worship this amazing God, when they lift their voices in praise and adoration to Him who lived and died and rose again, when these people are so radically transformed so that they live their lives in glad submission to the Authority of His Word, then God is truly glorified.

So, very specifically, I pray to accomplish three things in this Series. I want to find Answers, from the Scriptures, to three Questions:

1. *What* should we believe about the Church?
2. *Why* should we believe it?
3. *How* can we actually *be* a Church like this?

So, this Sermon Series on the Church will consist in us reading and analyzing various Passages from the Bible that pertain to the Christian Church, in its Origin, and in its Existence, in its Function, and by its Characteristics, and through its Practice. So, yes, this will be a "Topical" Sermon Series. And the "Topic" is the Church.

Now most of the time, Reformed people *reject* "Topical Preaching". Topical Preaching is the most *common* way that the modern Church conducts its Preaching and Teaching. And, normally, Topical Preaching is part of the Problem, because it is usually very shallow and very incomplete. So, the reason we normally *reject* Preaching like that is because only "Expositional Preaching" gives the complete *context* to the Scriptures that we want and need. For example, in **Ephesians 3:16-19**, the Apostle Paul told us what he wanted for God's people:

that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; *and* that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

.. and Expositional Preaching and Teaching, verse by verse, is simply the only way to actually accomplish that. But, all is well, because I'm going to conduct this "Topical Sermon Series" in an "expositional" way. So, this will be an "Expositional Topical Sermon Series."

Now the word "Church" is a modern version of the Old English, "cirice" or "circe", which meant: *a place of assemblage set aside for Christian worship; the body of Christian believers; Christians collectively; ecclesiastical authority or power,*". And these words were an anglicized *transliteration* from the Germanic word "kirika", which came from the Greek "kyriake", and came to be used as: "kyriake doma" or: "the House of the Lord."

But, in the Bible, the word "Church" was attached to the Latin word "ecclesia", which comes from the Greek word "ekklesia", which is actually two different words: "ek", which means: *out of*, and "kaleo", which means: *to call*. So, the *ekklesia*, the Church, are those who have been "called out of the world; and called out of sin".

And most people stop there and simply say that the Church are those who have been "called out". And that is true. But the entire *thrust* of the New Testament teaches not only what we have been "called out *from*", but also what we have been "called *unto*", since it would be *grossly* incomplete to simply be "called out" with no destination or goal.

So, the New Testament teaches, clearly and repeatedly, that even as we have been "called *out*" from sin and from the world, we have also been "called *unto*" at least three things:

1. To worship God
2. To edify one another
3. To display the Glory of God's Grace to the world

... not *only* to worship God. Not *only* to edify one another. And not only to display the Glory of God's Grace. All three of these are *equally* important, and we all should be engaged in all three.

So, in His Mercy, God has determined (before the foundation of the world) to "call out" a people for His Name's sake (for His Glory), who will live their lives, with *absolute abandon* (fearlessly) to worship God, edify one another, and to make Jesus Christ look magnificent. And *that* group of people are called "The Church".

Dear friends, we have to ask a very serious Question: "If Salvation is only about us going to Heaven, then why didn't God go ahead and take us all to Heaven as soon as we are saved? Why do believers remain on earth, some for many, many years?" And part of the Answer is: God leaves His Church on the earth in order that all of those God

chose to save are saved. So, *part* of the reason we don't go immediately to Heaven as soon as we are saved is because God desires to use His Church in "Evangelism". And, typically, "Evangelism" is understood as preaching the Gospel to every creature so that the lost may have an *opportunity* to be saved. But I would suggest that Evangelism is much MORE than merely an effort to "reaching the lost". Evangelism should be understood as the "*calling of the chosen ones, who are not yet saved*".

You see, God *already has* His people, His sheep, who have *already* been chosen for Salvation. And some are alive and living on the earth, while others have not yet been born. And the "Way" or the "Means" by which those "chosen ones" are "called out" of sin and the world is through the preaching of the Gospel.

So, as the Gospel is faithfully heralded to as many people every day as possible, using every means available, God sovereignly grants ears to hear, and eyes to see, and a heart to believe to those He has already chosen to save, the "called out one", His sheep, His Church. And as the Gospel is preached, the chosen ones hear, while the others remain spiritually deaf. As the Gospel is proclaimed, the chosen ones see, and the others remain blinded. And as the Gospel is heralded, the chosen ones are given the Gift of Faith so their heart is soft so they can believe, and the others are hardened.

So, Evangelism is really nothing more than the Instrument by which all of the elect are "called out" of sin and the world, and "called to" worship God, edify one another, and live their lives to God's Glory (make Jesus look magnificent). So, Evangelism is the "Way" God initially *gathers* His Church from the world.

Now the first time Jesus ever used the word, "Church" (Gr. *ekklesia*) was in His dialog with Peter beginning in **Matthew 16:13:**

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

Here, the only subject at hand is "*Who is Jesus?*" So, as Jesus is formulating His Church, the only Issue that matters is "*Who is Jesus?*" Everything *else* is way down the list. So, the *primary* Issue with The Church was, is, and always will be, "*Who is Jesus?*" Now look at their answer in **Matthew 16:14:**

And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."

Now the Issue, the *only* Issue in play here, is *Who is Jesus?* No other Subject is being discussed. And the answer given by the disciples tells us that the world at large simply did NOT know Who Jesus really was. So, they were confused about the only thing that really matters, *Who Jesus is.* So, now look at what Jesus asked next in **Matthew 16:15:**

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

First, Jesus wanted to know what the lost and unsaved people of the pagan world were saying about Himself. But now, He wants to know what those who are "called out" understand about Him. And look who spoke up in **Matthew 16:16:**

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

... now read what Jesus' response was to what Peter just said in **Matthew 16:17&18:**

And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven. I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it."

Original Greek: *καὶ γὰρ δέ σοι λέγω ὅτι σὺ εἶ Πέτρος καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ πέτρᾳ οἰκοδομήσω μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν καὶ πύλαι ᾗδου οὐ κατισχύσουσιν αὐτῆς.*

Now those who have lived for any length of time know that this is what the "Roman religious System" uses to justify the existence of both their own Organization and their Leader they call the "pope". They teach that, right here, Jesus called Peter "Rock", and that on that "Rock" (Peter) Jesus was going to build His Church. And many people agree with that. But as we look closely at this Passage, we see something very different than what these people wrongly teach.

First of all, *linguistically*, the Aramaic word that Jesus used here⁹ that was translated into Greek by Matthew (Levi) tells us a lot. When Jesus said:

... you are Peter ...

... He was using a word *Petros* (Strong's # 4074), that meant: “*little stone*” or “*pebble*”. But when He said:

... and upon this rock I will build My church...

... He was using a word *petra* (Strong's #4073), that means: “*large stone*” or “*boulder*”. So, it is obvious that Jesus was referring to two different “*rocks*”; a *larger, more* important one, and a *smaller, less* important one. Now Jesus is going to use Peter mightily throughout his life. He became the “*protos*”, the “*first among the Apostles*”. He was the unquestioned Leader of the twelve. So, his Standing (positionally) is *not* the same as John or Andrew or any of the other Apostles. So, what Jesus was saying could be understood as:

You, Simon, are “Peter” (pebble) because God used you to receive and articulate the Divine Revelation of Who I am. But you are a *smaller, less* important rock. And upon the *larger, more* important Boulder (the Divine Revelation of Who Jesus is) I will build My Church.

So, the “Rock” upon which the Church is built is NOT Peter, nor the Apostles, nor any Man or any Office, but it is the *Divine Revelation* (that only God the Father can give) that Jesus is:

... the Christ, the Son of the living God

Now, another way of looking at this is to examine what the Apostle Paul taught in **Ephesians 2:19-22**, when he said:

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the

⁹ While on earth, Jesus spoke only in Aramaic. He never spoke in Greek or Hebrew. His Words were translated into Koine Greek by the various writers of the New Testament. Those words were later translated into English by those who produced our Bibles.

foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

Here, Paul taught that the Church is built/established on:

... the foundation of the apostles and prophets ...

... yet this very same writer also said:

1 Corinthians 3:11

For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

... so, in **Ephesians 2**, Paul says that the Foundation of the Church is the Apostles and Prophets. Yet in **1 Corinthians 3**, he says that Jesus Christ is the Foundation. So, which one is it? Is the Foundation the men God used or is it Jesus Himself? How do we reconcile these two seemingly contradictory statements by the very same writer? By going back to **Ephesians 2** and realizing that Paul went on to say:

... Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*...

So, the Bible teaches that the "Foundation" of the Christian Church is the "Apostles and Prophets". But we need to look at several things in order to understand this fully. First, notice that Paul puts the Apostles *ahead* of the Prophets. Yet *both* groups of men were *equally* loved by God and *equally* saved. So, the only difference is in their *Ministry*, in what they taught, and in what they wrote down. The Old Testament Prophets talked *vaguely* and *enigmatically* about Jesus, and wrote down a *partial* Revelation. But the Apostles actually saw Jesus, and touched Him, and talked with Him, and received from Him the final, full, and *completed* Revelation of God.

And this tells us that Paul was anointed by God to develop the Divine Truth that the Teaching and the Ministry of the Apostles was *superior* to that of the Old Testament Prophets.

But does this mean then that the "Foundation of the Church" is *not* Jesus Christ, but is the Apostles and Prophets? Yes. But we need

to then ask, *“In what sense are the Apostles and Prophets the Foundation of the Church?”* It simply *can’t* be these men, *personally*, or *in their Office*, because Jesus was infinitely *superior* to *all* of them. And all of the Old Testament Prophets were dead and buried *before* Jesus rose from the dead and the Holy Spirit was given.¹⁰ So, *none* of the Apostles had ever even met an Old Testament Prophet, with the exception of John the Baptist.¹¹

So, in what *sense* are the Apostles and Prophets the Foundation of the Church? In what these men were “carried along” by God the Holy Spirit to write down in sacred Scripture. The Books of the New Testament are the final, full, and completed Revelation of God to Man. And this is so true that *all* of the Books of the Old Testament are to be interpreted by the Books of the New.

So, for example, we are to understand what God spoke through Moses in **Leviticus** by what the writer of **Hebrews** wrote in his Book. And we are to understand the Prophecies in **Daniel** by what God “carried along” John to write in **the Revelation**. And, under the New Covenant, the “didactic Books”, the Books that show how saved people are supposed to live their lives, are no longer the first five Books of Moses, but are the twenty-one New Testament Epistles.

Now that is *not* to say that the Books of the Old Testament are to be thrown out. They’re not. They are *fully* inspired, and fully *inerrant*, and *fully* infallible. But they are also *fully* incomplete. So, yes, what God gave to the Prophets (the 39 Old Testament Books) is *very* useful and *very* profitable for us today. But what these Books teach is to be analyzed *through the lens* of the 27 New Testaments Books. And only *then* can we formulate what we are to believe and teach. So, it is the *Revelation* of both the Apostles and Prophets that is the Foundation of the Church. In other words, it is the 66 Books of the Bible that holds up and secures the Church and on which the Church is built.

But what about Jesus? Paul said Jesus was the “Cornerstone” of the Foundation. And back in the 1st Century, the Cornerstone acted in the same way as “footers” act in our day. The footers or the cornerstone holds up and secures the Foundation. So, it is Jesus, *personally*, and

¹⁰ John the Baptist was martyred before Jesus was crucified and rose from the dead. This time frame is also important because the Church was not birthed until **The Acts 2**.

¹¹ Both Peter and Andrew were disciples of John the Baptist before they became disciples of Jesus

through His finished Work that holds up the Foundation of the Apostles and Prophets.

So, the Church is built upon the Foundation of the Divine *Revelation* of both the Apostles and Prophets (summarized by the Revelation that God gave to Peter), and it is Jesus, in His sinless Life, vicarious Death, bodily Resurrection, physical Ascension, and ongoing Ministry as Intercessor that *holds up* the Foundation and *sustains* it.

So, either way you look at it, the Church is NOT built on Peter or any other Man. The Divine Revelation of *Who Jesus is* is the “Rock” on which the Christian Church is built. And the term “**Christ**” comes from a Greek word that means: “*Anointed One*”. So, “the Christ” is the long-awaited “Messiah” that the Jews were looking for. And the phrase “**Son of the living God**” has to do with Jesus being of the very *same* Substance or the *same* Essence of that of God the Father, meaning that Jesus ***IS*** God.

So, Salvation (and entrance into the Church) comes by way of an individual being “blessed” to have God the Father *reveal* to Him that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah, and that He is God Almighty in human flesh. And those who truly believe that, and who openly and publicly confess that, and who put their full faith and trust in this God/Man and in what He alone did will be saved. And all those who are saved are members in the invisible (true) Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.