

The church is of Divine Origin

That the God of the universe purposed, promised and prepared the way for His kingdom on earth cannot be denied. Not the fleshly kingdom sought by the Jews of the first century, or the future millennial kingdom envisioned by Premillennialists; but a kingdom that would best manifest in its coming, the manifold wisdom of God (Ephesians 3:10-11). The prophets foretold of this kingdom (Daniel 2:44; Isaiah 2:2-3). John the Baptizer and Jesus prepared the way for its imminent appearing (Matthew 3:2; 4:17). Jesus told His disciples that they would be given the keys to this kingdom, which He would build (Matthew 16:18-19). This kingdom, which had been in the mind of God in eternity would be the divinely conceived institution known as the *"church of Christ."* The only church on earth in which God would save all men (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:23).

The prevailing view of the church among religious peoples is that the church is unimportant. So much so, that it is a widely accepted belief that one church is as good as another. However, God's Scheme of Redemption was no afterthought. Everything pertaining to the church and man's salvation lay in the eternal mind of God. The apostle Paul wrote of God's plan which was to include the church of Christ in our salvation. *"...and might reconcile them both in one body unto God through the cross..."* (Ephesians 2:16). Thus it is the case that God made provision for all men and women to be saved from their sins and be reconciled back to God IN the church of Christ which is Christ's body (Acts 2:40; Philippians 2:12ff).

It is said that the angels of heaven desired to look into (understand) God's plan to redeem humanity, but it was not until the church of Christ first appeared on that day of Pentecost, AD30, in the city of Jerusalem, that the angelic powers of heaven could see the profound wisdom of God Almighty (1 Peter 1:12; Luke 24:46-47; Acts 2:16-47; Ephesians 3:10-11). The very existence of the church of Christ on earth shows not only God's wisdom, but its importance as well!

Establishment of the Church

The grand words of Scripture open to us God's revealed will for redeeming us all back to Himself. From Genesis to Revelation the Bible teaches that we have all sinned and have fallen short of His glory (Romans 3:23; 5:12). Thankfully, through His loving nature, God devised a plan to save us. Through the giving of His beloved Son on the cross of Calvary (John 3:16-17; Romans 5:8-11), God's eternal plan included reconciling us in ONE body through the cross (Ephesians 2:16). The body of Christ is not His physical fleshly body, but the precious spiritual institution and government conceived in the mind of God before the worlds were created (Isaiah 9:6-7; Ephesians 1:4-10). A religious institution that was purposed (not an accident) promised (not a surprise), prophesied (not unknown).

Throughout the Old Testament preparation was made for the coming of the future kingdom (The church of Christ) that would find all nations flowing into it. Isaiah foretold of the day when the law (the gospel, the law of Christ) would go forth into the world beginning at Zion (Jerusalem) (Isaiah 2:2-3). The mountain of the Lord and the house of God into which many people (all nations) would go is a reference to the ONE church (1 Timothy 3:15). Indeed, this prophecy came true (was perfected) in Jerusalem on Pentecost in AD30 when Peter preached the first gospel sermon and the church of Christ was founded (Acts 2:22-38).

Up until that day the Bible speaks of the kingdom/church as coming in the future. But after Acts chapter 2, the Bible never speaks of it as a future event again. Only after Jesus died and ascended to the right hand of God in heaven, reigning as king, could the kingdom/church have its beginning (Acts 2:30; Ephesians 1:19-23). The ONE kingdom, the church of God's dear Son, was founded by NO man, but by Jesus Christ Himself (Matthew 16:18; Luke 24:44-49). The church was never an after-thought, or an interim measure, nor was it an emergency plan set in place because God was unable to foresee the rejection of the promised Messiah by the Jewish people. The folly of

Premillennial thought should amaze everyone who possesses an ounce of reason.

The Scriptures say the church of Christ was in the mind of God BEFORE the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4ff). The reality of the church reveals God's all knowing power and His eternal purpose for the salvation of humanity (Ephesians 3:10-11).

Identifying Marks of the Church

With hundreds of denominations all teaching their own plan of salvation, all saying they are the church of the Bible; how does a person sift through it all and find the ONE true church? By simply searching the New Testament Scriptures, one will find God's only blue print for the church. Like a recipe, you must add all the ingredients in the proper portions if you desire to recreate the same cake or pie every time. The Bible does the same thing for us today as well as every generation. The words of the New Testament show us those who were pleasing to God because they followed His commands exactly. Therefore we too can please God if we follow their example and only God's word. God gave a pattern (blue print) to Moses and Noah for constructing the tabernacle and ark (Genesis 6:14-16; Hebrews 8:5). Recognizing then that God commands us not to add to or take away from His Word, should we not follow the one and only pattern for the church (Deuteronomy 4:2; Revelation 22:18-19)?

Whether organization, or worship, or name, when you walk into a church building you should find the people there following the Bible alone on every point. The church of Christ today is the same religious institution established by God in Jerusalem for the saving of man in AD30. The church of Christ has continued to follow the ancient order of God's immutable declaration found only in the New Testament since its beginning. If you were to compare the Lord's true church with the Scriptures you would find that it has followed the blue print, because the Lord's church is reproducible the same way, every time.

The kingdom of God (church of Christ) exists and is preserved in the seed - the Word of God (Luke 8:11). A preacher once said, *"If you want to grow Georgia watermelons in Texas, you wouldn't have to plant it in Georgia and let the vine touch every state between here and there; just pick up the seed and plant it here, and it will grow here what it grew there. In like manner, the seed of the kingdom doesn't have to be in the ground growing all the time from the first century until now; just pick up the seed and plant it here, and it will produce in the twenty-first century what it did in the first century."*

Our only authority in religion is the inspired Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16-17). We do not have, nor do we accept creed books, Church manuals, other testaments of Christ, etc. Our organization is that which God established from the beginning - the autonomy of each congregation. We do not accept authority of conventions, congresses, synods, or the Vatican because they are man-made. Jesus Christ Himself is the ONLY head of the church (Matthew 28:28; Ephesians 1:22-23). There is no earthly headquarters for the church of Christ, no institution that has authority over another congregation. Only qualified men are allowed by God to oversee the congregation of which they are and have been members. These men are chosen by the members of their congregation to oversee the work and to serve as bishops (Titus 1:5-7), shepherds (1 Peter 5:1-5), pastors (Ephesians 4:11), overseers (Acts 20:28), elders (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). The qualifications, all of which must be met are found in 1 Timothy 3:1-11 and Titus 1:5-9). Deacons serve under the authority of the eldership as does the preacher.

No one can join the church for which Jesus died (Acts 20:28). Only the Lord can ADD to His church those who have truly been saved (Acts 2:47). The saved consist of any person of responsible age who believes, confesses, repent s and is baptized in order to receive the remission of their sins. Only after ALL these conditions have been met will God add the saved person to the ONE body/church/kingdom - the church of Christ (Romans 6:3-11; Colossians 1:13; 2:12).

Imposters of the Church

Most religiously thinking people in the world must agree that hell and Satan truly exist, and that the devil is the great deceiver and desires to sift us all like wheat. I think we can also agree that we must not be ignorant of the multitude of ways the devil can and will use to ensnare us (2 Corinthians 2:11). One way that Satan has captured the souls of millions is by way of Pseudo-Christianity. "Pseudo" refers to that which is 'false or fraudulent,' or to something that is counterfeit.

In a pseudo way, the devil tried desperately to tempt Jesus into following him. First by urging Him to turn stones into bread; second by misapplying Scripture; and third by offering earthly kingship (Matthew 4:1-11). Satan continues today to tempt men through counterfeit Christianity.

Most people are unaware that they have been duped by the devil's artistry of deceit (1 Peter 5:8). Scripture plainly informs the open and honest minded individual that there is only ONE religious body (Ephesians 4:4; Romans 15:4-5). Paul defines what constitutes that ONE body. "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" (Colossians 1:24). Paul, an inspired apostle expressly states that the body of Christ is also the church of Christ. When we add this verse to Ephesians 4:4 and other passages we find that there is and can only be ONE church!

God never planned the establishment of two or more churches - but only ONE. Jesus said, "...I will build My church..." (Matthew 16:18). He did not say 'churches.' When the church that belongs to Christ first began at Jerusalem in AD 30 (Acts 2), all 12 apostles believed the same doctrine, taught the same doctrine, converted the world in the same way (Philippians 2:2; Romans 15:6; 1 Peter 3:8), and God added all the saved to only one church. Paul rebuked the Corinthians for dividing into different groups and commanded them not to be divided (1 Corinthians 1:10). Division we are told

is a "work of the flesh" which will prevent us from inheriting heaven (Galatians 5:19-21).

Secular history shows that men devised religious groups of their own and taught contrary to Christ's doctrine. This became the devil's device in establishing a multitude of "pseudo-Christians."

For us to live spiritually we must be attached to the ONE true vine - the one and only body of Christ (John 15:1-7). The devil offers alternative vines that bring no spiritual life whatsoever. One of the first major alternative vines was the Roman Catholic Church (AD 590). Then centuries later that vine split into various factions - Greek Orthodox, Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Baptist, Mormon, Jehovah's Witness, Salvation Army, etc. etc. Each of these bears their own fruit, but not the true fruit of the Savior.

Stop and think for a moment about Christ being the vine and the branches representing every member added to that one vine by God in baptism. Each branch being nourished by the same doctrine, and each one bearing the same fruit. Now consider a vine that has been separated from the main vine and nourishes its branches with a different doctrine, bearing dissimilar fruit. Slowly, one by one each branch detaches itself and forms numerous vines, each producing diverse fruit of its own. Not one of these vines is attached to the original, nor are they bearing the same fruit as the original. Denominationalism is representative of all these various vines and differing fruits (false doctrines).

The genuine vine, being the body of Christ, also called the church of Christ, is the only authentic religious body that all men and women must be added to to be saved. Denominations cause division, which is a sin and abomination to God (Galatians 5:20). Pseudo-Christianity was never in the mind of God (John 17:20-21). False teachers such as Billy & Franklin Graham, Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, Charles Stanley, John Hagee, T.D. Jakes, Max Lucado, Rick Warren, and many, many others, say they believe in one church, but that God has seen fit to allow differing branches of the one church. They teach that differences in doctrine do not matter as long as we all confess Christ as Lord

and Savior. However the Bible says that doctrine does matter. Paul told Timothy, "charge certain men that they teach NO OTHER doctrine" (1 Timothy 1:3). Instead we are all to "walk (live) by the same rule" (Philippians 3:16), "speak the same thing" (1 Corinthians 1:10); possess the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5; John 17:20-21). These men only help to further the devil's lie, "thou shalt not surely die having joined a man invented denomination." God commands all men and women everywhere to believe only one doctrine and to be added to the ONE and only church that can save - the church of Christ.

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605-222-2611

mike@riverviewcofc.net

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Concerning.....

The church



By Michael S. Demory