

DOCTRINE

THE CHURCH

LESSON #12

INTRODUCTION

The first reference to a church in the New Testament is found in Matt. 16:18 ("...upon this rock I will build my church..."). The meaning of "church" is (1577) a calling or an assembly, a religious congregation. It can refer to a local meeting (Acts 2:47) or to the "Church" worldwide (Eph. 5:27 - "...a glorious church..."), the Bride of Christ. The Church is described as being the body of Christ (Rom. 12:5, I Cor. 10:17, I Cor. 12:13, I Cor. 6:15, Eph. 1:22, Col. 1:18), the Church of the firstborn (Heb. 12:23), Christ's reflected glory (Eph. 3:20), the sanctified ones (I Cor. 1:2), God's cultivated field and building (I Cor. 3:9), members one of another (I Cor. 12:26), and the manifestation of God's wisdom (Eph. 3:9-10).

FOUNDING OF THE CHURCH

- (1) Col. 1:26-27 - "...the mystery...hath been hid from ages and from generations...which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."
Matt. 16:18 - "...the gates of hell shall not prevail (2729- overpower, exercise force) against it."
Eph. 6:12 - "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against...spiritual wickedness in high places." (heavenlies)

From its inception to this present day, the Church has and will always encounter opposition and enemies. We must remember that all "attacks" against the True Church have their incentive and ability from the wicked one, the devil.

Matt. 16:13-20. In one sense, the founding of the church was weak and shaky (it was based upon men who had previously denied the Lord in His most trying time). Of course, this is in man's view. But the Scripture says that Jesus was crucified in weakness (II Cor. 13:4), and God has established, or founded, the church on the apostles and prophets with Jesus, the Cornerstone. That God would use men at all is amazing, but there is abundant power and direction for these men. In the above reference (Matt. 16:18) we are told that Jesus would build His church on "this rock." Some say that Jesus would build His church upon 'Himself' because the word is interpreted as being 'a large rock,' while Peter is 'a small rock.' We feel that Jesus meant that He was establishing His church on people, including Peter in the same manner of Eph. 2:19-22, which is the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

Eph. 2:21-22 - "In Whom (Jesus) all the building fitly framed (4883 - to render closely joined, organized compactly) together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord. In Whom ye also are builded (4925 - to construct, compose in company with other Christians) together for an habitation (2732 - dwelling place, to house permanently) of God through the Spirit."

The same doctrine is taught in II Cor. 5:18, in that we are given the ministry of reconciliation and become ambassadors of and for Christ. Note that in Matt. 16:19 Peter was given the keys of the kingdom and power to loose on earth. We have this power today also. It is the inherent power of the Gospel acting in a man who is yielding himself to God. Remember that the Lord has established the church through the ministry of the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20) but this did in no way end. The same responsibilities rest with us as we continue to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ

(II Cor. 5:18). In its broadest scope and meaning we carry on the great and awesome work of God in this Grace Age.

John 20:23 – “Whosoever sins ye remit (863 – to send forth, lay aside, send away), they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain (2902 – to use strength, seize, hold fast), they are retained.” First of all, this ‘power’ to remit and retain sins is based upon what Jesus has already done at the cross. We are privileged to act as “agents” of the Lord. This responsibility is to make men aware that they are in need of a Savior. Remember that we are to advise, warn, beseech, and exhort men to be ‘reconciled’ to God. If they reject this “provision for salvation” then they are retaining (holding onto) their own sins and we warn them of the consequences of their decision. We must inform them that they now stand in judgment of the Lord. As agents of God’s grace and Good News we are then ‘free’ to seek others that are in need of salvation and will listen to our word (i.e. His Word).

- (2) Christ, the Head of the Church – Eph. 1:22-23 – “...and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.”

This Scripture associates the church intricately with Christ, that is, as His body. We could not be closer related than this. He feels all that we feel, and is the strength of all that we should do. In fact, Jesus is of such power and glory that to be associated with Him is to become full. His fulness filleth all in all. We need not seek things of the world to make us full; we have that fulness in Christ. This headship is also likened to that of husband and wife (Eph. 5:23). This relationship is not only one of authority, but one of love and care. Jesus said, “...I will never leave thee...” (Heb. 13:5) and “I will comfort you” (John 16:33, John 14:18). So there is protection in the church. There is fellowship, pleasure, guidance, hope, etc. Notice also the Scripture says, “...He is head over all things to the church.” When one receives Christ and becomes a member of the church, he is in essence submitting himself to the total control that Jesus wants to exert upon all who will receive it. This control is the type of control our own heads exert over our bodies. Also, this submission is the type of submission we very willingly give. We cannot join the church as we would a club or a lodge. The church is an organism, not an organization. We must be partakers of Christ’s life before we can become members of it. With the above information, read also Col. 1:15-19.

- (3) The Church Apostles – Eph. 3:1-10

The Apostle Paul was specifically called the Apostle to the Gentiles. The bulk of the church has come out of the Gentiles, and the truths he gave are church truths; so we think it is safe to call him the church apostle. He was the one who brought the revelation of the mystery that the Gentiles would be fellow-heirs with Israel. The truths of Christ in you, our position in the heavenlies, church order, and the reality of the depth and fulness of Christ for the believer. (Rom. 2:16) – “In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.” This apostle had quite an important place on God’s program in that his gospel would be used to judge the people of the church. (Rom. 16:25) – “Now to Him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel...” It is an awesome weight to know that what you are teaching is to be used to establish God’s people. The whole Bible is given by inspiration of God and is profitable (II Tim. 3:16); however, we need to pay special heed to the writings of this apostle.

1. Who is the cornerstone of the church? Who or what else is the church built on?
2. Who is the head of the church?
3. What is the churches responsibility according to John 20:23?
4. How do we become partakers of the life of Christ?
5. Why are Paul's writings so important for the church today?