

What Makes A Church A Church?

March 27, 2011 – Pastor Dr. Ronnie Wolfe

Matt 16:18 *And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

INTRODUCTION

It is a very serious thing that we should take the church lightly in our thoughts. The church of the Lord Jesus Christ should be a paramount, or a very important, part of our thinking. We should ponder it habitually, pray for it consistently, and attend it regularly.

But what makes a church a church? Is it a fly-by-night establishment built upon the whims of personal preferences or mundane principles? No, it is not! When thinking of a church, many ideas must be placed upon our minds in order to ponder the subject of the church properly. Today we will consider some of those ideas and hopefully will increase our appreciation for and our commitment to the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I. A CHURCH MUST HAVE A FOUNDER

We come again to our text for today, Matthew 16:18, where Jesus said, “. . . and upon this rock I will build my church . . .” In scripture Jesus is referred to both as a rock and as a stone. In your Bible in 1 Cor. 10:4 we read, *And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.* Notice: Romans 9:33 *As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.* Also note 1 Peter 2:8 *And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of*

offence, [even to them] which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.

Now this is our Founder—Jesus Christ. He said, I will build my church.” There is no other foundation than this one. 1 Cor. 3:11 *For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

Then those churches which are founded upon a man or upon a man’s doctrine are all false churches. If Christ is the Founder, then no man can build a church. He built his church upon the apostles. From an all-night prayer meeting with his Father in Heaven, Jesus came down and chose twelve men to be his apostles (See Luke 6:12-16).

1 Cor 12:28 says, *And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.* So, Jesus set in his first church the apostles as the primary “first” (proton: first in priority and honor) the apostles. They were the ones to whom the Lord gave gifts of healing, gifts of tongues (though the gift of tongues was subordinate to other gifts), and the receiving of the word from God to write down his inspired words. These twelve were a very special group to which we should even today give honor, and we should listen to their words as they are written down in God’s word. This special group of men is referred to in the New Testament many times as “the twelve.” They were very special to our Lord and to the church of the Lord.

It is, we believe, to the church that the Lord addressed Matt. 28:18-20, a proclamation that sets the church on a world-wide mission, or, as some call it, a commission. He has the authority to do this, since he is our Founder.

II. THE CHURCH MUST HAVE THE TRUTH

1 Tim. 3:15 *But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*

Some say the word of God came from the church, but we say that the church came from the word of God. John the Baptist came as a result of prophecy from the Old Testament (Isaiah 40:1-5). Jesus came as a revelation of the Old Testament Scriptures. Jesus taught his apostles his own doctrine from his Father, which was the word of God. Later Christ's teachings were written down by the apostles and others to reflect the word of God, not to create it from the mind of man or the church, but to reflect a word that had already been taught from God himself—Jesus Christ.

So, the truth comes to the church from the word of God. Paul told Timothy that he was to “preach the word” (2 Tim. 4:2). Timothy was not to create the truth but was to preach it from the word of God. The word of God was directly given by inspiration to both the Old Testament writers (2 Peter 1:21) and to the New Testament writers (2 Tim. 3:16). It was then ended at the close of the book of Revelation (Rev. 22:19) so that we have today “that which is perfect” (1 Cor. 13:10).

Love rejoices in the truth (1 Cor. 13:6). We love one another in the truth (3 John 1:1). We are to have a testimony that we walk in the truth (3 John 1:3). John 8:32 says that the truth will make us free. Romans 1:25 says that some change the truth of God into a lie, and worship and serve the creature more than the Creator. Eph. 4:15 says, *But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, [even] Christ:*

There can be no church without the truth, and the truth is the word of God, both the living word of God and the written word of God. Remember, the church of God is the pillar and the

ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15).

Now, we must, first of all, speak the truth in a way that can be understood: 1 Cor 14:9 *So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air.* Verse 19 says, *Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that [by my voice] I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an [unknown] tongue.*

Also, we must speak the truth in love: Eph 4:15 *But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, [even] Christ:* There is much more that could be said here, but we need to go on to the next point.

III. A CHURCH MUST HAVE RELATIONSHIP'

A. First, we must have a relationship with Christ, who is the head of the church.

Mt 21:42 *Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?*

Eph 1:22 *And hath put all [things] under his feet, and gave him [to be] the head over all [things] to the church,*

Eph 4:15 *But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, [even] Christ:*

Eph 5:23 *For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.*

Col 1:18 *And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all [things] he might have the preeminence.*

1 Peter 2:7 *Unto you therefore which believe [he is] precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner,*

B. Second, we must have a relationship with Christ as the one who perpetuates the church, sustains it against all falsehood and those who would want to destroy the church.

Mt 28:20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, [even] unto the end of the world. Amen.

This church will continue throughout the ages through the sustaining hand of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He will not allow his church to go out of existence. He started building his kind of church in his public ministry, having all principles needed for the existence of a real, literal, and local church, and he continues to build it today. He will continue to build that kind of church until the end of the world (or of the age). When Jesus comes, the churches of the Lord Jesus Christ will still be here preaching the same truth that was preached by them in the New Testament.

C. Third, there must be a relationship with people, one toward the other. A very delicate balance must be maintained between the members of a local church. 1 Cor. 12:27 tells us that we are “members in particular.” In this same chapter, in 1 Cor. 12:25-26 we read: *That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. 26 And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.*

Only men can be preachers. There were no women preachers in the New Testament church, and there should be none today: Paul told young Timothy in 1 Tim 3:2 *A bishop (pastor) then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; A woman cannot properly the husband of one wife.*

This is also followed up by another teaching, which my mother taught me early in life. She

read the Bible and learned this, because our preachers did not teach this truth. Notice in 1 Cor. 14:34-35 *Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. 35 And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.*

Now that we have that in its place, let's look at Rom. 12:16 [*Be*] *of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.* We are to have the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5), a willing and submissive mind to the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

D. Fourth, we must have unity in the churches of the Lord. Eph 4:3 *Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.* And how long should we keep this unity? Eph 4:13 says *Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:*

E. Fifth, we must have evangelism (soul winning) in the church. Philip was an evangelist (Acts 21:8), and in Eph. 4:11 the Lord gave to some the gift of evangelism. Then Paul told Timothy, a preacher, to do the work of an evangelist, 2 Tim. 4:5.

Evangelism is a work for all believers. After the power of the Holy Spirit had come upon that local church at Jerusalem, they were given a commission to be witnesses into the whole world: Acts 1:8 *But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.* Paul told the church at Corinth in 2 Cor. 5:20 *Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech [you] by us: we pray [you] in Christ's stead, be ye*

reconciled to God.

F. Sixth, we must have love in the church. Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica and said in 1 Thess 4:9 *But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.* Gal 5:13 tells us: *For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only [use] not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.* Eph 4:2 says, *With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;* Eph 4:16 *From whom the whole body (the local church) fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.* Col 2:2 *That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ;*

G. Seventh, we must have action in the church. Jesus said in John 9:4, *I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.* A church is to be busy about the Father's business even as our Lord was when he was only 12 years of age. God calls people to a work: Acts 13:2 *As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.*

H. Eighth, we must have an invitation in the church. There must be a time when people who are hearing the word of God can respond to its message and the leading of the Holy Spirit in their lives. People come before the church for several reasons.

First, people come before the church to confess to the church that they either have a need for salvation and desire help and/or prayer from the church, or they are confessing that they have

trusted the Lord by grace and come to profess him publicly and submit to scriptural baptism and become a member of this church.

Second, people come before the church to move a membership from another church of like faith and order. By “faith and order” we mean that the other church must be a sister church, one that has the same basic Baptist doctrine as this one, and they must maintain their order of receiving and dismissing members in the same way that this church does. These people may be accepted into the membership of this church by receiving a letter of recommendation from the other church of like faith and order.

Third, people come before the church to repent of sin in their Christian lives, desiring to return to faithful service to the Lord, and, if necessary, reaffirming their commitment to this church if their name has been put on an inactive list, to reinstate them as an active member and be in full fellowship of the church again.

Fourth, some people may be a member of a different denomination or religion, and they may desire to become a member of this church. In order to do that, they must confess their sins to God and profess to this church that they have put their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, depending upon his death, burial and resurrection and faith in Christ as the only means of salvation. Then, they must submit themselves to scriptural baptism to become a member of this church in full fellowship of the church.

The invitation to trust the Lord and to return to him in faithfulness goes out to everyone who comes to this church to hear the preaching. The invitation is universal. The Savior is ready, willing, and able to save whosoever will come to him in repentance and faith. *We are all the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:26).*

IV. THE CHURCH MUST HAVE GLORY

The church of the Lord Jesus Christ does have glory if it is the right kind of church and if it teaches and preaches the truth of the word of God, founded upon its Head, Jesus Christ.

When a person is a member of a local church of Jesus Christ, he is in a living institution that brings glory to God through Jesus Christ. Notice Eph 3:21 *Unto him [be] glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.*

We have all come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23), Abraham gave glory to God by not staggering at the promise that God gave him (Rom. 4:20). 1 Cor 10:31 says, *Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.* This glory is had in the churches of the Lord: 2 Thess 1:4 *So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure:*

Personally, I believe that the local churches of the Lord are earthly organizations and that there will be no churches in Heaven. These are meant to preach the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ so that people can be saved, preach the truths of the word of God so that people may grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord, and to have fellowship among the members for comfort, exhortation, and love.

However, I do believe, as our verse has told us, “Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.” Not the churches themselves, but the glory of the churches, the honor given to our Savior, the obedience paid to him, the surrender given to Christ as our Head, the submission to God as the Father of our Lord, and the glory received from God and to him through his church on earth will last “world without end. Amen.”

Paul says in 1Cor. 6:20 *For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body,*

and in your spirit, which are God's. Do you desire to glorify God in your body? We have learned that he receives glory in the church, his kind of church, his local churches. If you have this desire, you may submit yourself to membership in this church or a church of like faith and order to bring glory to the God of heaven.

I desire to glorify God, and in his church he receives glory. How is it with your soul?

This church has come from a long line of churches. You may see our lineage of churches back to the beginning of our country on the chart on the bulletin board back where the water fountain is.

This kind of churches has been in existence since the days of Jesus Christ, and they will be here when Jesus comes again. They have never gone astray nor gone out of existence. Many have tried to bring back what they thought was a true church that faded away, but, my friend, churches do not fade away as to kind. One or many churches individually may go away, but the Lord's kind of church continues. This was his promise to his churches in Matthew 16:18 and Matthew 28:18-20.

When Bro. Charlie Ashcraft came to this city to start a work, he came from another church of like faith and order. He did his work based upon the truths of God's word and God's promise to his churches. This church was organized with the purpose of sustaining the preaching of the truth for many years to come. This is the 63rd year of that endeavor. Only four pastors have stood behind the pulpit of this church, and God has been faithful to this church to sustain and bless it. He has sent members to grace the attendance and work of this great organization. Many ups and downs have brought this church to what it is today. We pray God will bless this local church to his glory for many years to come, yeah, even unto his coming.