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THE CHURCH IN CHRIST'S DAY

The history of the Church begins not in 1830, as we sometimes think, but actually in the time of Christ and His apostles. The Church we represent was formally organized in 1830. It is significant that we of the Restoration believe this not to be a new church but literally that one built by Christ many centuries ago. A knowledge of the history of the Church, from that day to this, forms the basis of belief that this Church is not just another religious organization. It is, in fact, Christ's own Church.

Our first consideration is of the promise of Christ: "Upon this rock I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18). There are many who believe this to have been a symbolic statement rather than a statement of fact. Some others do believe that Christ has a church but that it is an unorganized body consisting of all the good people of all churches regardless of their contrasting beliefs. We believe that Christ spoke literally and that the Scriptures of the New Testament witness that a definite organization was accomplished. Christ's Church was a divine organism. In the Scriptures we find the Church symbolically referred to as the "body of Christ" (see 1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 4:12; Colossians 1:18).

WHY DID CHRIST BUILD HIS CHURCH?

Back of Christ's promise to build His Church we find His purpose. It is not unreasonable to ask, however, why should He build a new church? There were a number of sects of Judaism such as the Pharisees and Sadducees in His day. These were composed of people who believed in God. The Pharisees were a body of very devout men, at least according to their beliefs. They lived strictly by the moral standard they believed to be set forth in the law. More than this, they were men of influence. Why did not Christ join them and through His leadership reform their beliefs? They would then have become His Church. Certainly this would have added prestige to His work. The answer is simple—their beliefs were taught by the precepts of men; and though they honored God with their lips, their hearts were far from Him. They were prejudiced by the indoctrination of centuries-old tradition. Their hearts were not open to new truth. Christ gave this example: "No man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine doth burst the bottles and be spilled" (Matthew 9:25; Mark 2:20; Luke 5:37-38). None of the forms of Judaism were adequate to express the spirit of Christianity. Christ was to teach new doctrine, radical to the extreme in that day. In contrast to the old teaching, "An eye for an eye" (Exodus 21:24; Matthew 5:40), He said, "Whosoever smite thee on the right cheek, turn the other also" (Matthew 5:41). His teaching that men should love their enemies (Matthew 5:46) was one that Judaistic bodies could not have assimilated. Christ built His Church that it might be based on new principles and give adequate expression of His spirit. That God's Kingdom was to be built up and His righteousness established through the Church is evidenced by Christ's early instruction to His disciples, "Seek ye first to build up the kingdom of God and to establish his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). He built His Church because there was no religious organization on the earth capable of carrying on His work. He had to have an instrument through which His authority (Matthew 7:28-29) could continue, through which His personal ministry and leadership might be given.

UPON THIS ROCK

Jesus gave a parable of two men, one building his house upon sand and the other upon rock. His statement, "And it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock" (Matthew 7:24-25), is similar to His proclamation, "Upon this rock . . . and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18). Many believe that the rock upon which the Church was built was Peter. Some have said it was Christ Himself. Still others say that it was Peter's confession of Christ that was the rock. We believe it goes beyond Peter, who was a man and moveable. Since Christ was the cornerstone of the Church (Ephesians 2:20-21), which was built upon the rock, it was not Him. As important as was the confession of Peter, it was the experience which made it possible that held promise for all men. Jesus

said, "Flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 16:18). In this experience, truth known of God, but not of man, was revealed to Peter in such a way that he recognized Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:17). This was a divine experience. Paul later emphasized the importance of revelation in relation to both the knowledge of Christ and His gospel (see 1 Corinthians 12:3; Galatians 1:11-12). Thus, the rock upon which the Church was built was the divine experience of the revelation of Jesus Christ and the truth that shall make men free (see John 8:31-32).

MINISTERS IN CHRIST'S CHURCH

The Church had for its foundation the apostles and prophets, with Christ Himself the chief cornerstone (see Ephesians 2:19-20). That there were specific ministers in the Church is a scriptural fact. The purpose of these ministers in the Church is noted by Paul: "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; till we in the unity of faith, all come to the knowledge of the Son of God, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive" (Ephesians 4:11-16). Certainly the specific ministers were placed in the Church for the purpose of giving leadership in the work entrusted to the Church. These ministers were apostles (Ephesians 4:11; 1 Corinthians 12:28; Luke 6:13), prophets (Ephesians 4:11; 1 Corinthians 12:28; Acts 13:1-2), seventies (Luke 10:1-2), high priests (Hebrews 3:1, 5:1, 8:3), evangelists (Ephesians 4:11), bishops (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Philippians 1:1), elders (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5), priests (Hebrews 7:11), teachers (Ephesians 4:11), and deacons (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8ff).

It is important to note that the ministers in Christ's Church are individuals specifically called to the special function of their separate offices. Paul uses the analogy of the parts of the body to teach this, finally stating that all are not apostles, all are not prophets (see 1 Corinthians 12:29). From this writing we can see that the functions are separate and specific, for the foot would not do the work of the hand.

PRINCIPLES OF THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST

The Church taught the basic principles of the doctrine of Christ. Paul enumerates these as, "repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, and of the resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment" (Hebrew 6:1-2).

A study of the Scriptures reveals many instances in which Christ taught these principles. Jesus came to Galilee preaching repentance (see Mark 1:12-13), returning to God in the parable of the prodigal son (see Luke 15:11-32), and the lifetime process required by His admonition to the woman in adultery (see John 8:3-11). He used incidents such as the woman healed of the issue of blood (see Luke 8:44-49), and Peter sinking in the water (see Matthew 15:19-27) to teach faith. The coming of Christ to John for baptism (see Matthew 3:41-46) and His teaching of Nicodemus (see John 3:3-5) emphasized the doctrines of two baptisms. He laid hands on the sick (see Mark 6:7; Luke 4:40) and by the same method blessed little children (see Mark 10:11-14). His disciples later used this ordinance also to bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost (see Acts 8:14-17, 19:5-6) and to ordain men to priesthood responsibility (see Acts 13:1-4). The literal resurrection of Jesus (see Matthew 28:1-5) evidenced that principle, and with the promise of His second coming He taught eternal judgment (Matthew 25:32-47).

POWER IN THE CHURCH

However, the Church was not merely one of priesthood and doctrine; it was distinguished by its power (1 Thessalonians 1:5). Paul was greatly concerned that those coming into the Church should know of this. He addressed the Corinthian Saints accordingly: "Now, concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant" (1 Corinthians 12:1). He continued to instruct them about this matter, listing for them some of the ways in which the Holy Spirit is manifested in the Church (see 1 Corinthians 12:1-11). Joel, the prophet, had also foreseen other manifestations (see Joel 2:28). Wisdom, faith, and knowledge are as much the gifts of God's spirit as are miracles,

prophecy, and speaking in tongues. Paul taught that not every man had every gift and admonished all to “covet earnestly the best gifts” (1 Corinthians 12:29-31).

THE LOVE OF GOD

The distinguishing mark of discipleship and thus basic to the Church was the expression of Christian love. The Master said, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35). Early in His ministry He had commanded a quality of love that surpassed any previous requirement. He taught that His disciples should love friends, neighbors, and enemies as well. He admonished, “Bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you; and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:46-47). When asked which was the first commandment, He said, “Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength And the second is like this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Mark 12:35-36).

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST

Christ did build His Church. It was organized with purpose. Moving by the power and light of God’s Holy Spirit, it taught the doctrines and practiced the ordinances of salvation, ever challenging men to the greater achievement—the triumphant building up of the Kingdom of God and the doing of His will on earth as it is done in heaven.

Questions for Discussion

1. When did the history of the restored Church begin? Why do we need to date it before 1830?
2. What was the rock upon which God built His Church?
3. What two teachings of Christ differed radically from Judaistic principles?
4. Give an example of Christ sending out ministers.
5. Give instances when Christ taught faith, repentance, and baptism.
6. Jesus said that men would be known as His disciples when they did what things? Can we find the followers of Christ by the same means today?
7. In what sense is the Church of Christ a divine organism?
8. Why did Christ build His own Church instead of joining another religious sect of His day?
9. How does Paul’s analogy of the human body apply to the organization of the Church?
10. What two great commandments did the law and the prophets depend upon, according to Christ?
11. Christ gave an early command to His disciples that their first concern should be what?