

IDENTITY OF THE CHURCH

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. For There To Be Identity, There Must Be Distinction And Singularity.
- B. Denominationalism Affirms:
 1. There is no distinction and/or singularity.
 2. That it doesn't matter which doctrine one embraces if he/she is not hypocritical.
 3. That one church is as good as another.
 4. That the church of the first century cannot be identified today.
 5. That indeed, there is no distinctive pattern to follow.
- C. The Promise Of Christ To Build His Church (*Matt. 16: 18*) Implies A Definite Pattern: That It Will Be Both Singular And Distinctive, Otherwise How Could One Know Whether It Was The Lord's Church, Or Whether It Was One Built By Someone Else?
- D. Some Distinct Singularities Which Identify The Church Which Christ Promised To Build:
 1. Who was its founder or builder?
 2. When did the church which Christ established begin?
 3. Where did the church which Christ built begin?
 4. What did one do to become a member of Christ's church?
 5. What did the church which Christ built practice in worship?
 6. What did its members believe and teach?

II. AIM.

To Research And Know The Points Of Identity By Which The Church We Read About In The Bible Can Be Recognized And Reproduced Anywhere On Earth Today According To The New Testament Pattern.

III. OUTLINE.

A. WHO WAS ITS FOUNDER OR BUILDER?

1. Christ promised to build His church. (*Matt. 16: 13-18, esp. ver. 18*)
 - a. The question: "Who do men say that the Son of man is?" (*ver. 13*)
 - b. The answer: The opinions of men given. (*ver. 14*)
 - c. The question to the apostles: "But who say ye that I am?" (*ver. 15*)
 - d. The great truth confessed: "...the Christ ...the Son of the Living God." (*ver. 16*)
 - e. The source of Peter's understanding: Divine revelation. (*ver. 17*)
 - f. The promise to build His church upon this truth: i.e. that He is the Son of God. (*ver. 18*)
2. Christ promised to build His church upon the fact the He is the Son of God:
 - a. The Roman church affirms that the church was built upon Peter, which means "a stone." (*Cf. John 1:42, footnote in some versions*)
 - b. The above claim is false for the following reasons:
 - 1) Πέτρος = PETEROS in Greek (Peter, means a stone, and is 2nd person, masculine gender and cannot agree with church in Greek).
 - 2) Πέτρα = PETRA in Greek (A rock, large stone, i.e. massive bed rock and is 3rd person, feminine gender and can agree with church in Greek).

- 3) Thus Jesus promised to build His church upon the great truth confessed by Peter. (Since He is the Son of God, He had the power to bind Satan (*Luke 11:21-22*), overcome death (Hades), and to build His church.)
3. Proof that Peter was not the foundation of the church:
 - a. Isaiah prophesied that God would lay a stone in Zion for a foundation (*Isaiah 28:16*), and both Christ and Peter applied the prophecy to Christ, not Peter. (*Matt. 21:42; Acts 4:11*)
 - b. Paul affirmed that no other foundation could be laid upon which to build, than Christ. (*1 Cor. 3:11*)
4. Christ kept His promise and built His church:
 - a. Those who obeyed the gospel were saved and added to the church. (*Acts 2:41, 47*)
 - b. Paul affirms that Christ purchased the church with His blood (*Acts 20:28*); that He "...gave Himself for it, that He sanctified, cleansed and washed it of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." (*Eph. 5:25-27*)
5. From the above passages, it is certain that Christ did indeed build His church. The church built by Christ is both singular (He built but one) and distinctive - it has identity! Any church built by anyone else is not the church of the Bible.

B. WHEN DID THE CHURCH BEGIN?

1. The time of the beginning of anything is important - especially the beginning of the Lord's church, because there is so much controversy as to when it began.
2. Prophecies and their fulfillment help establish the beginning date:

a. *Isaiah 2:1-3 cf. Luke 24:45-47.*

- 1) A prophecy concerning Judah (Jewish nation) and Jerusalem. (*ver. 1*)
- 2) Concerned with "the mountain of Jehovah's house." (i.e. prophetic language meaning kingdom.) (*ver. 2*)
- 3) "Mountain of Jehovah's house" exalted above the hills. (i.e. above all other kingdoms.) (*ver. 2*)
- 4) All nations to flow unto the mountain of the Lord's house. (*ver. 2*)
- 5) Law of the Lord to go forth from Zion or Jerusalem. (*ver. 3*)
- 6) Christ alluded to the above when He said: "Thus it is written...that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name unto all nations, beginning from Jerusalem." (*Luke 24:45-47*)

NOTE: On Pentecost following the resurrection, there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven in the city of Jerusalem (*Acts 2:5*) - See 1) above; on this day the church (kingdom) began (*Acts 2:41, 47*) - See 2) above; the doctrine of repentance and remission of sin was preached for all nations (*Acts 2:38-39*) See 4) & 5) above. Thus, the law went forth from Jerusalem unto all nations as the Lord had prophesied by Isaiah.

b. *Daniel 2.*

- 1) Nebuchadnezzar's dream. (*vs. 31-35*)
- 2) Daniel's interpretation. (*vs. 36-45*)
- 3) Identification of the four kingdoms:
 - a) Babylonian with Nebuchadnezzar as king (600 - 536 B.C.).

- b) Medo-Persian, established by Cyrus of Persia and Darius of Media (536 - 330 B.C.).
 - c) Macedonia, established by Alexander the Great and divided among his generals in 325 B.C.
 - d) Roman, established as world power by Octavius Caesar in 30 B.C. It was to be in the days of these kings that the God of heaven would establish His kingdom.
- 4) "In days of these kings..." (*ver. 44*)
- a) Little stone...became great mountain (prophetic imagery for kingdom). (*ver. 45*)
 - b) God's kingdom set up during days of Roman Caesars.
- c. The kingdom (church) constantly spoken of as being in future before Pentecost of *Acts 2*:
- 1) John the Baptist: "...at hand." (*Matt. 3:2*)
 - 2) Jesus: "...at hand." (*Matt. 4:17*)
 - 3) The twelve under limited commission: "...at hand." (*Matt. 10:7*)
 - 4) Jesus: "...will build..." (*Matt. 16:18*)
 - 5) Eleven before the ascension: "...at this time...?" (*Acts 1:6*)
- d. The kingdom (church) in existence from *Acts 2* onward:
- 1) *Acts 2:47*: ("...added to church": K.J.V.); ("added to them, etc.": other versions)
 - 2) *Acts 8:1*: "...church which was at Jerusalem..."
 - 3) *Acts 20:28* Paul charged: "...take heed ...to feed the church..."

4) *Col. 1:13*: Colossian Christians were "...translated...into kingdom..."

5) *1 Thess. 2:12*: Thessalonians were called into "...kingdom."

3. From the above evidence, we learn that the Lord's church became a reality on the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Jesus Christ in the city of Jerusalem.

C. WHERE DID THE CHURCH BEGIN?

1. Prophecies concerning where the church or kingdom was to begin:

a. *Isaiah 2:3*: "...word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

b. *Luke 24:49, 52*: "...tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high..." *ver. 52*: "...returned to Jerusalem..."

c. *Acts 1:8*: "But ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you... witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea..."

2. Fulfillment:

a. Time: Day of Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ. (*Acts 2:1*)

b. Event: Reception of power from on high - the Holy Spirit. (*vs. 2-4*)

c. Place: Jerusalem. (*ver. 5*) - Lord added saved to the church. (*ver. 47*)

3. The church of Christ began in the city of Jerusalem.

D. WHAT DID ONE DO TO BECOME A MEMBER?

1. The plan of salvation of the Lord's church is both singular and distinctive in that it is a single plan for all ages and distinct from all other plans.

2. That which the people on Pentecost did to be saved and added to the church is that which all others, recorded in the book of Acts, did to be saved; and it is the same thing that one must do today in order to be saved. From the book of Acts we learn that those on Pentecost:

- a. Heard the gospel (i.e. the death, burial, resurrection and exaltation of Christ). (Acts 2:22-35 cf. Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 1:21, 15:1-4)
- b. Were admonished to "know assuredly," (i.e. believe beyond all doubt) that Jesus is both Lord and Christ. (Acts 2:36 cf. Rom. 10:9-10)
- c. In response to the sermon they were cut to the heart (i.e. believed they had crucified their Messiah) and asked the question "... what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37)
- d. They were told to "...Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38)
- e. As many as gladly received the word were baptized, received the forgiveness of sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and were added to the church. (Acts 2:41, 47)

3. Today those who obey this same gospel plan of salvation, still receive the forgiveness of sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit and are added to the same church, without joining any denomination!

E. WHAT DID THE CHURCH WHICH CHRIST BUILT PRACTICE IN WORSHIP?

1. "And they continued stedfastly in the apostle's teaching..." (Acts 2:42) i.e. preaching and teaching the word of God. (Cf. Acts 20:7, 1 Cor. 1:21)
2. "And they continued stedfastly in...fellowship..." (Acts 2:42) i.e. contributing of one's money. This is the same Greek word which is used in Romans 15:26 and translated "contribution." (Cf. 1 Cor. 16:1-2)

3. "And they continued stedfastly in...the breaking of bread..." (Acts 2:42) i.e. observing the Lord's supper. (Cf. Acts 20:7, 1 Cor. 11:23-26)
4. "And they continued stedfastly in...the prayers." (Acts 2:42)
5. The early church also praised God with the fruit of their lips in singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16 cf. Heb. 13:15)

F. WHAT DID MEMBERS OF THE LORD'S CHURCH TEACH AND BELIEVE?

1. The church which Christ built can be identified by the doctrine that is taught and believed.
2. The true church had/has a distinct doctrine, which was and is to be taught:
 - a. Timothy was to charge certain men at Ephesus *not to teach a different doctrine.* (1 Tim. 1:3)
 - b. Titus was to instruct that elders were to *be able to exhort in the sound doctrine, and to convict the gainsayers.* (Titus 1:9)
 - c. Titus was to speak *sound doctrine.* (Titus 2:1)
 - d. Paul charged Timothy to "*Hold the pattern of sound words which thou hast heard from me...*" (2 Tim. 1:13)
3. How can we "teach a different doctrine" if there is no standard and if one doctrine is as good as another? How can elders exhort in, and convict gainsayers by sound doctrine, if there is no right or wrong in religious teaching? More importantly, how may we "hold the pattern of sound words" which Timothy heard from Paul?
 - a. Paul affirms that what he preached (spoke) was revealed to him by Jesus. (Gal. 1:11-12)
 - b. That he wrote to the churches what had been commanded to him. (1 Cor. 14:37)

- c. That every scripture is inspired and is profitable for doctrine. (2 Tim. 3:16-17)
- d. Therefore, the New Testament is to be the authority for that which is taught and believed by the church.

IV. CONCLUSION.

A. The Church Which We Read About In The Bible Is:

- 1. The church which Jesus purchased with His blood. (Acts 20:28)
- 2. The church which began on the day of Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ. (Acts 2)
- 3. The church which began in Jerusalem. (Acts 2)
- 4. The church which has a definite pattern in items of
 - a. Membership requirement.
 - b. Worship.
 - c. Doctrine.

B. When The Pattern Of The New Testament Church Is Followed, It Will Reproduce The Church We Read About In The Bible Anywhere On Earth And It Can Definitely Be Identified Today.