

UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIANITY (4)

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Over 2,000 years have passed by since Jesus Christ established the church of Christ. Christ still lives; his church still lives also. All believing and repentant people who have been baptized into Jesus Christ have, in a figure, “put him on” and have been added to the Lord’s church by the Lord Himself. Have you been added to Christ’s church?

Hello I’m Larry Murdock. I preach for the Gandy church of Christ. Good morning and welcome to this program.

You can read about the birthday of the church of Christ in the New Testament book named Acts, chapter 2. Jesus began building a collection of followers as he walked and preached in the land of Palestine. But it was **after** Christ’s crucifixion and ascension back to His Father that He sent the Holy Spirit to guide the apostles in the establishment of the church of Christ. It happened ten days after Jesus’ ascension; it happened on the Jewish feast day called Pentecost. That feast day always fell on the first day of the week, the day we call Sunday. The date for the feast of Pentecost was counted from the Sabbath day that fell in the week of Passover. The Jewish feast of Passover was celebrated on different weeks from year to year because it was counted on the lunar calendar. But the feast day of Pentecost was always counted as the 50th day from the Sabbath day of the Passover week. In fact, that was the reason it was called Pentecost, because the word means “50.” Therefore, Pentecost always fell on the first day of the week; the day we call Sunday.

“When the day of Pentecost arrived, they [the apostles of Christ] were all together in one place. (2) And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. (3) And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. (4) And they [the apostles] were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.” (Acts 2:1-4 ESV.)

The news of what happened in that house ran rapidly through the streets of Jerusalem so that a huge crowd surrounded the apostles. The multitude heard these apostles preaching whatever it was the Holy Spirit wanted them to say. The people who gathered were amazed to hear in their native dialects these apostles of Christ talking about the “mighty works of God.” This was the beginning of the birthday of the church of Christ.

But the church of Christ added no members on that day until the apostle Peter convinced those who believed that Jesus was the Christ to “repent and be baptized.” Then they that believed in Jesus and gladly received Peter’s command were baptized, “and there were added unto them that day about 3000 souls.” (Acts 2:41.) Verse 47 says, that “the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” The only way for the church of Christ to grow in number is for the Lord Jesus to “add” people. Whoever receives salvation by believing in Christ, repenting of their sins, and being baptized for the forgiveness of their sins is added to the Lord’s church by the Lord Himself. In the New Testament of Christ there is no such thing as voting on members.

Jesus had promised that He would build His church. While on a journey to the area of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus had asked his apostles a question: “who do people say that I am?” Of course, Jesus knew what people were saying about him, but His question set the stage for His second question when he asked his apostles directly: “Who do **you** say that I am?” Peter spoke first: “You are the Christ, the son of the living God.” Then Jesus made a prediction with a promise: “I say unto you, You are Peter [the word Peter means “stone”] and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of [hades] will not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16:17, 18.) There are two “rocks” in verse 18, the same word in two places. However, the word is written in two genders. The word translated Peter is in the masculine gender; it was a man’s name. But the second word is in the feminine gender where Jesus promised, “Upon this rock I will build my church.” Metaphorically Jesus said, “You are a small stone, but upon this great ledge of rock I will build my church.” The great ledge of rock is Peter’s confession that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God.

It is also interesting to see from where Jesus was getting his metaphor of the “rock.” The record states that Jesus and his disciples were at a city called Caesarea Philippi. That city was built near the foot of Mt Herman in Lebanon, and

it was famous because of where it was built. The whole city was built upon solid rock. Jesus used that metaphor of a great ledge of rock to indicate that His church is built upon a solid, eternal foundation. The apostle Paul said that the “household of God” is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone....” (Ephesians 2:20 ESV.) To the Corinthians Paul wrote that “... no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” So the confession that Peter made is the solid upon which the church of Christ is built. It is a solid fact that Jesus is God’s Christ; Jesus is the Son of the living God.

Christ is the builder and He is the foundation upon which the church is built. But Jesus said something else about the church that indicates its longevity. Jesus said that “the gates of hades would not prevail against it.” Hades is the residence of those who have died. By this saying Jesus indicated that even death could not destroy the church. That’s right! When a faithful member of the church of Christ dies that person has not left the church. Death cannot separate him or her from the Lord Jesus Christ. He or she is still in the kingdom of Christ. The apostle Paul asked this question: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?” Then he answered, “As it is written, ‘for your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:35-39 ESV.)

On the day of Pentecost it was only after Peter had preached the gospel that Jesus began building His church. The church of Christ is built through preaching and teaching of the gospel, the good news that God has sent a Savior. The church was built at a high price. It cost God His Son; it cost Jesus his blood. Acts 20:28 says that God’s church was purchased with his own blood. In Ephesians 5:25 Paul wrote that “Christ loved the church and gave himself for it.” Because Jesus is the builder and the buyer, He is also the divine head of the church. He is the church’s only Head! The headquarters of the church of Christ is in heaven, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. There is no earthly headquarter. Not in Rome;

Not in Istanbul. Not in America! Yes, Jesus continues to be the Head of His Church.

Jesus' apostle Paul said that he wished that all people could see "the exceeding greatness of [God's] power to us-ward who believe." God's mighty power was seen when God raised Jesus from the dead. Also His mighty power was seen when God set Jesus at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come. God has put all things under Christ's feet, and gave Christ to be the head over all things to the church, which is Christ's body, the fullness of Christ that fills all in all. (Ephesians 1:19-23.) And so, it is no wonder that Jesus holds the reins of power in the church and in the world. After all, Jesus is the "image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible. Whether thrones, dominions, or principalities or powers: all things were created by him, and for him. 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." (Colossians 1:15-18 ESV.)

Since Jesus is the head of the church and the king of kings, it is no wonder that it is His Law that governs the church of Christ. This divine law is recorded in the New Testament of Jesus Christ. It is mentioned in Galatians 6:2 where Paul wrote, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper as a memorial of his sacrifice for the sins of mankind, he took a cup of grape juice and said, "Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." (Matthew 26:27, 28 KJV.) A "testament" is a will or a "covenant"; we might call it a contract. It is something that a person leaves behind when he dies. Its purpose is to indicate how a man's inheritance can be divided among his beneficiaries. Jesus said that the fruit of the vine represented the blood he would shed in his death. That blood and that death would begin a new era called the "New Testament." It was Christ's testament, Christ's will that he left behind when He ascended back to his father to take his seat of power. The night before his crucifixion Jesus promised his apostles that they would receive the guidance of the Holy Spirit after He was gone from the earth. Jesus said, "**When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to**

come. (14) He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” (John 16:13-14 ESV.) The Holy Spirit was the Executor of the Will of Christ. These men who received the Holy Spirit of truth are the people who wrote the New Testament of Jesus Christ. The New Testament contains the truthful information that the church of Christ needs. By obedience to the Will of Christ you can become a member of the church that is nearly 2000 years old. Please seek out and find a church of Christ near you.