

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 33, Number 8

February 21, 2016



## The New Testament Church, Introduction

*And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. 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. (Matthew 16:17-18, KJV 1900)*

Although the Greek word translated "Church" in the New Testament was an old and rich historical word in the ancient Greek culture, this passage records the word's first appearance in the New Testament. As Jesus prepared His people for His new community of believing worshippers, He covered every detail necessary for their well-being and effective work that He would assign to them from that age till the Second Coming.

Obviously, based on New Testament teaching, this thing called "Church" is highly important in Christian faith and worship. Sadly, we live in an age of abysmal ignorance regarding this New Testament subject. Anyone with any remote religious idea can attract a few followers, start meeting, start teaching them, and call themselves a church. They ignore; calling yourself a "Church" doesn't mean that the Lord agrees. The nineteenth century in America was the scene for several major movements of people who hid under the canopy of Christianity, but who taught ideas unknown and unheard of prior to that time. Each group's leader loudly claimed that the true church and the true gospel had been lost. According to them, the historical church had fallen so deeply into error that it no longer existed, so God had privately and undeniably (According to their opinion) called them to start a new movement from scratch and thereby restore true Bible Christianity to the world. First and foremost, this self-serving claim contradicts the Scriptural witness regarding the Lord's intent with and in His church.

*Unto him be glory **in the church** by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen. (Ephesians 3:21; emphasis added)*

According to this New Testament teaching, not only will the Lord's church exist at the time of the Second Coming, but it shall also survive and exist during every age from the first century till the Second Coming, "...**throughout** all ages." If one of those nineteenth century self-proclaimed prophets had been correct, the New Testament is wrong. Without apology, I'll rely on the New Testament as true.

Further, New Testament teaching affirms the Lord's own design for this church. (1 Timothy 3:14-

16) It is the Lord's church whom He has vested with the custody, preservation, and care of the truth of the gospel. According to this passage, the Lord's "Church" is the "...pillar and ground of the truth." In the case of those nineteenth century false prophets, they built their movement around the idea that they personally were God's new "pillar and ground of the truth." Any individual who thinks himself or herself to be the anchor of Bible truth, while thinking that all other believers are inferior and wrong if they dare to disagree with him or her, is no less deceived and contradictory to Biblical teaching than these false prophets. Often these self-proclaimed prophets will listen to the sermon from the pulpit with hypercritical ears, and then begin to preach from their private "Pulpit" in the church fellowship hall or "house to house." (1 Timothy 5:13) Even preachers will occasionally delude themselves into thinking that God has appointed them as the "Pillar and ground of the truth" instead of the church. One such preacher loudly claimed in conversation to me that God had "Revealed" to him that the church was wrong, and that God had called him single-handedly to set the church right. God doesn't call men to contradict what He has revealed in Scripture. Such self-proclaimed prophets are wrong, Biblically wrong, and should be soundly rejected. God didn't teach one thing in Scripture and change His mind in the 1900s or today. According to His purpose and work, His church is still the "pillar and ground of the truth." And He therefore works through that church, not through individuals who oppose or contradict that church. No, this does not imply that any church is infallible. It does affirm the Biblical principle. Sixty years of Bible study and observation leads me to one conclusion. Despite sadly observing more than one church in deep error, a long, historical perspective strongly confirms; a church is far more often correct and reliable as the custodian of the truth than any individual believer.

God willing, I hope to spend significant time in this study to affirm the New Testament design and character of the Lord's "Church."

...*I will build my church.* We will begin with a study of the name itself, "Church." However, first let's take careful note. This thing called "Church" is not simply another fraternity of like-minded people.

It is not a mere business organization that verbal or emotional bullies can domineer and manipulate to their whim and fancy. A group may for a time lapse into either of these twisted molds, but they shall soon come face to face with the Lord's judgment and rejection, not at all comparable to a fraternity or a business. It is a community of people whose gathering and continuity is the result of the Lord's intervening grace. It is "...my church." It is not the pastor's church, the deacons' church, or the dominant family's church.

Some debate typically occurs over the precise meaning of "this rock" in this passage. The Roman Catholic Church uses this passage to support its belief that Peter was the first pope and the original "Rock" of their church. While I could take you into a comprehensive and well documented word study from this passage to disprove that idea, there is a far simpler way to disprove it.

*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. (1 Peter 2:7)*

These are Peter's own words, not the belief of people in subsequent generations. Peter categorically states his personal belief (I also believe that Peter wrote by the Holy Spirit's guiding influence so that the words are in fact the words of the Holy Spirit Himself, not merely Peter's personal opinion) that Jesus is the chief corner stone in the building of the church. In ancient construction, the chief corner stone was the most important stone in a building. Surely, if Jesus had intended to teach that Peter would be the stone on which He built His church, of all people, Peter would have known about it. If Peter in honoring Jesus personally as the chief corner stone of the church rejected the notion that he was that stone of the church, we have a very personal and powerful witness to the truth of Scripture that Jesus, not Peter, is the church's one true foundation.

There may be a legitimate discussion regarding one point from this passage. Is Jesus personally the foundation stone of His church, or is the foundation stone of the church the true confession that Jesus is "...the Christ, the Son of the living God"?

*Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God. And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19-22)*

My answer is that both points are true. Jesus is the one and only true foundation stone of His church; further, those who truly belong to the community of believers who make up that church do believe in the truth regarding Jesus' true identity as wholly man and wholly God, "...the Christ, the Son of the living God."

In Scripture, "Son of" refers to someone of the same nature and dignity or legal status. When Jesus referred to God as His "Father," the Jews clearly understood precisely what he meant, and they became enraged and we're ready to stone Him for blasphemy, for claiming that He was equal with God. So states John 5:18. If any group of people can lay any legitimate claim to being a New Testament Church, they must embrace this truth. Otherwise they have no basis in Bible evidence and truth to make the claim.

*...the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* By Jesus' reference to the hostile forces that ever oppose the Lord and His church, He affirms the same point that Paul makes in Ephesians 3:21. If the gates of hell did prevail against the Lord's church, she would cease to exist, as claimed by the various nineteenth century self-proclaimed prophets, along with all similar prophets at any time they make such an unbiblical claim. No, the Lord's church has never ceased to exist, not for a second since the first century. If we believe Scripture, she shall continue to exist till the Lord returns in victorious glory. She may dwell in different continents or have different names, but she shall exist. And within her walls and from her trumpet towers shall go forth the same true gospel that Paul and other apostles preached, what Jesus taught them to preach, a gospel that shall give Him the glory in His church.

*...for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.* Revelation; Peter sincerely and truthfully answered Jesus' question. Jesus tells Peter that his knowledge of Jesus as "...the Christ, the Son of the living God," did not grow out of Peter's intellect or by someone telling Peter about Jesus. Peter knew this truth by God's revelation of it to Peter. Occasionally deluded souls will think that every point of their personal belief about Jesus came to them by direct revelation no less than to Peter. Quite often, folks with this mindset are the folks with the most off-the-wall bizarre ideas imaginable. People who hold to true New Testament teaching make no such claim. Consider Paul's words.

*How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) (Ephesians 3:3-4)*

Notice the flow of information that Paul affirms. The Lord made a truth known to Paul which had been unknown through all past ages. Paul came to

know this truth by “revelation.” Paul knows that the Ephesians shall not have a similar revelation. He tells them that they shall gain their knowledge of this truth by reading what he wrote, not by revelation. Jesus assured the disciples that they should not even think about what to say when challenged or questioned about Him and their faith in Him. He would give them what to say in that hour. However, this immediate and personal revelation did not continue. It was limited to the first disciples. When Paul taught Timothy, first notice the point; **Paul taught Timothy**. He didn't tell Timothy to give no thought, for God would give him what to say in the hour of need. He rather taught Timothy how to be prepared to preach and to answer for his faith.

*Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus. (2 Timothy 2:15-17)*

Today the minister of the gospel or the studious believer must follow Paul's teaching and Timothy's example. Don't wait for a revelation. It came and quite adequately revealed the gospel to that first generation of chosen witnesses. We learn about it today by hearing the gospel of truth and by studying the Scriptures and rightly dividing them, “*Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand...*” To wrongly divide Scripture is the error of which Paul warned Timothy regarding profane and vain babblings. Such wrong division of Scripture as claiming a personal revelation instead of respecting God's complete revelation in Scripture is a clear example of “*profane and vain babblings,*” not a model of truth. Scripture is God's “*...more sure word of prophecy.*” (2 Peter 1:19-21) We do well only as we read this word, believe it, learn from it, and apply its teachings in our lives.

Thus we begin our study of the Bible doctrine of the church. The church of the Bible is something that the Lord builds in His way, not a benevolent social club of man's origin. And, Lord help and pity the poor people who think so wrongly, it is not the equivalent of a business, to be managed and manipulated by one man forcing his will and way over other men. ***It is a unique body of people who should devote their lives to serving each other and thereby serving the Lord,*** not to manipulating and controlling each other to their personal whims and wishes.

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church  
16434 Woodruff  
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday  
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.  
Pastor