

BIBLE FACTS ABOUT THE CHURCH

CHAPTER ONE

Three Classes of People

When we select a subject for our monthly lessons we search for the Scriptures that will shed the most light on the subject. These Scriptures, when put together, will unlock some of the mysteries that sometimes surround the selected subject. Many times, these Scriptures give us a handle so we can get a firm grasp of the matter. We try to use Scriptures that paint a portrait; or Scriptures that will give us a view of what is recorded in the Word of God. This is especially true of our subject on “Bible Facts about the Church.” We find these Scriptures in Matthew chapter sixteen, verses thirteen through eighteen.

This truth, the mystery of “the Body of Christ,” is the key to understanding the Scripture, and especially the understanding of prophecy. As the Old Testament prophets looked ahead they saw only the glory of the Kingdom age. The reference to the suffering Messiah and the intervening “age of grace” was a mystery to them. There is more confusion on this subject than any subject I know of in religious circles today.

Our only purpose for these lessons is to let the Word of God speak for itself. Much of the confusion that surrounds this subject would be eliminated if we would follow the simple instructions Paul gave to Timothy.

“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (II Timothy 2:15)

The word “rightly” means “in a straight manner.” The word “dividing” means “to make a straight cut; to dissect; to expound correctly the divine message.” We see the reason for following this advice in the following Scripture.

“Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God.” (I Corinthians 10:32)

According to this verse of Scripture there are three classes of people in the world today, “the Jews, the Gentiles and the Church of God.” We must therefore keep in mind which class of people to whom the Word is directed.

All Scripture is written “for us.”

“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.” (Romans 15:4)

However, all Scripture is not written “to us.” But these Scriptures were written as an “admonition” or “warning” for us today.

**“Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples:
and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the
ends of the world are come.” (I Corinthians 10:11)**

In the Old Testament there were only Jews and Gentiles. The Jews were the direct offspring of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. All the rest were Gentiles.

After the call of Abraham the message was to the nation of Israel. The Gentiles were mentioned only as they related to the Jews.

More than half of the Bible relates to one nation, Israel. God gave them promises that were not given to any other nation.

As we continue our study of the Word, it would appear that all of God’s dealings with Israel relate to this earth. If they were faithful and obedient the Jews were promised earthly greatness, power and riches. If they were disobedient they would suffer the loss of these blessings. This is not necessarily true with God’s dealings with the Church.

There are no direct instructions in the Old Testament that pertain to the Church. Moreover, the Church is not even mentioned in the Old Testament, but appears only in “types and shadows.” Therefore, we should be careful as we study the Word to apply that which is written to the Jews to the Jews, and that which is written to the Church to the Church.

We often hear the earthly promises that God made to Israel applied to the Church. This, I am sure, is the cause of much of the confusion concerning this subject. It is therefore important that we understand the difference between the Jews, the Gentiles and the Church of God.

I would like to quote what Dr. C.I. Scofield said on this subject many years ago. “It may safely be said that the Judaizing of the Church has done more to hinder her progress, pervert her mission, and destroy her spirituality, than all other causes combined. Instead of pursuing her appointed path of separation, persecution, world-hatred, poverty, and non-resistance, she has used Jewish Scripture to justify her in lowering her purpose to the civilization of the world; the acquisition of wealth, the use of an imposing ritual, the erection of magnificent churches, the invocation of God’s blessing upon the conflicts of armies, and the division of an equal brotherhood into “clergy” and “laity.”

The New Testament is full of information and is very clear concerning what the Church is; the requirement for entrance, its mission, program and destiny. I am amazed that so few religious, church-going people know so little about what the Bible calls THE CHURCH. In the following lessons we will try to set forth what the Bible says about this important subject.

Up until the time that the Lord Jesus Christ revealed the Church, He had offered the Kingdom to the nation of Israel. This Kingdom was foretold by the prophets of old. This Kingdom refers to the literal rule of the Messiah, the King on earth, over the house of Israel. The message was “repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand.” Proclaimed by John the Baptist, the Apostles and Jesus Himself, this offer was made only to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

**“These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them,
saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into
any city of the Samaritans enter ye not:
But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.**

And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matthew 10:5-7)

This offer was accompanied by the signs mentioned in verse eight. It would be very foolish and hard to explain for one to try and make this commission a commission for the Church. Carefully read this Scripture and you will understand what I mean. The Kingdom age was never offered to the Gentiles. The Gentiles will share in the glories of the Kingdom age only as they relate to Israel.

This offer of the Kingdom was rejected. **“He came unto His own, and his own received Him not.” (John 1:11)** It is then that the Lord began to reveal something new and different, never before revealed in Scripture.

**“Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you:
Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.” (I Peter 1:10, 11)**

The Prophets of old searched diligently, but they were still unable to reconcile the sufferings (the cross) with the glory (the kingdom). The reason that they could not understand is made plain to us in Ephesians.

**“If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me to you-ward:
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)
Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; (Ephesians 3:2-5)**

The “dispensation of grace,” or the “Church Age,” was revealed for the first time by Paul and was called “a mystery.” **“That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.” (Eph. 3:6)** Because this mystery was hid from the world, **“...which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God...” (Eph. 3:9).** This mystery was hid, **“According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Eph. 3:11)**

To those of us who live this side of Pentecost, the Church age is no longer a mystery.

**“Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:
To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” (Colossians 1:26, 27)**

Before Jesus ever mentions the Church for the first time, (Matthew chapter sixteen), He begins to lay the foundation of what the future would be, (Matthew chapter seven). Jesus begins the revelation of the Church with a solemn warning and re-enforces this warning in Matthew chapter thirteen with the parables.

We are warned from the very beginning that the Devil will do everything in his power to keep people from knowing and obeying the truth.

First, Jesus warns us of “two roads.”

**“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”
(Matthew 7:13, 14)**

Verse fifteen and verses twenty-one through twenty three, of Matthew chapter seven, gives a graphic description of those who are on the “broad road.” We can see how closely these false prophets imitate the message of the Church.

“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” (Matthew 7:21-23)

Jesus says that many are on the broad road (verse 13), identifying the broad road as a very religious road. Jesus gives the reason they are on the broad road in verses 24-27.

“Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.” (Matthew 7:24-27)

Of the many different names used in the Word of God to describe the “one true Church” one is a “building.” We have seen that there are two roads, the “narrow road” that leads to eternal life and the “broad road” that leads to destruction. Both are described as a building. The only difference in these roads is the foundation. The narrow

road is built upon the “Rock,” the Lord Jesus Christ. The broad road is a building built upon a man-made foundation of shifting sand.

Ask yourself, “What road am I on? What building am I a part of?” Make sure you are on the right road with the right foundation. Both buildings came under attack by rain, flood and wind. One building withstood the attack; “the gates of Hell shall not prevail upon the Church built upon the proper foundation.” This was not true of the one built upon the man-made foundation of sand.

CHAPTER TWO

The Origin of the Church

Before we take up the nature and membership of the “one true Church,” we must define the word “church” itself. This is a New Testament word mentioned by our Lord for the first time in Matthew chapter sixteen. The Greek word translated “church” is “ecclesia” from which our words “ecclesiastical” and “ecclesiastic” come. The word is composed of two words “ek” and “kaleo,” meaning “to call out.” In the simplest form it refers to “a called out company of people,” separated from others around them.

Apart from the New Testament teaching, the word “church” means “any assembly of people, or congregation, united by some common bond, having a mutual purpose and program.” In this sense any group of religious people can be called a “church,” just as Israel, in the wilderness, was called a “church.” They were a separated company of people with a common purpose. In this sense any group of people can be called “a church,” but this is not “the” Church. As noted before there is a great difference between “a” church and “the” Church.

Bear in mind that the word “church” has two distinct applications. First, the word “church” is applied to a local assembly of believers. When Christians are assembled together, whether in a home, tent, or cathedral, it is called “a church.” For instance, we find in the New Testament “a church in Corinth,” “a church in Ephesus” and “a church in Thessalonica.” These names are given to distinguish them from other Christians who may be meeting in other cities such as Rome or Galatia. In these assemblies members of the “one true Church” (the wheat) as well as unbelievers (the tares) can be found. These names are only used to identify groups in different places.

Never once in the Bible do we find any of these local assemblies calling themselves after men’s names. They did not have names to identify their doctrines or creeds such as we have today. They did not call themselves after human leaders, no matter how godly these human leaders may have been. Paul warned against using men’s names and, I believe, this was in order to keep the union of all believers. Paul admonished them for calling themselves after men’s names. (**“I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.”**)

**“For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren,
by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are
contentions among you.
Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul;
and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.
Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye
baptized in the name of Paul?” (I Corinthians 1:11-13)**

The first mention of the Church in the Bible is found in Matthew chapter sixteen.

**“When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?
And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?
And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”
And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: 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 16:13-18)**

In these six verses there are a number of facts stated. An understanding of these facts are very important if we are to know the full meaning of what the Church is, its purpose, its program and its mission.

Fact #1: Jesus said “I WILL BUILD my Church.

This means that the Church was yet future and did not exist at that time.

Fact #2: Jesus said “I will build MY CHURCH.

He did not say, “I will build a church”

He did not say, “I have built my Church.”

He did not say, “I am building my Church.”

Fact #3: We see, then, that Jesus was going to build HIS CHURCH.

Jesus said “Upon THIS Rock I will build MY Church.

This reveals the Foundation upon which Jesus was going to build His Church.

Fact #4: The gates of Hell shall not prevail (over-power) His Church.

Fact #5: Jesus gives the requirement for entrance into His Church; what one must believe about the Lord Jesus Christ. **“Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God.”**

Examining the Facts

Fact #1: Jesus said “I Will” build my Church. This means that the Church did not exist at this time. It would begin some time in the future. Jesus did not say “I have built,” or “I am building.” This becomes a very important fact. This alone teaches that Jesus was not talking about Israel as being the Church, or that the Church was replacing Israel.

It also reveals that Jesus was not talking about the Kingdom age. The kingdom had already been offered to Israel, and had been rejected. **“He came unto his own, and his own received him not.” (John 1:11)**

Jesus was talking about the “dispensation of the grace of God,” as recorded in the third chapter of Ephesians.

“If ye have heard of dispensation of the grace of God

which is given to me to you-ward: (Ephesians 3:2)

**“Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;
That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:
(Ephesians 3:5, 6)**

**“And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ.”
(Ephesians 3:9)**

By no stretch of the imagination can anyone say that the nation of Israel, or the Kingdom age was hidden from man. Apart from the first twelve chapters of Genesis, the rest of the Old Testament, as well as the first ten chapters of Matthew deals with the nation of Israel, and describes in detail the Kingdom age promised to Israel.

Just before He ascended into Heaven Jesus told the disciples that the Church would begin “not many days hence.”

**“For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.”
(Acts 1: 5)**

We are told how many days in Acts chapter two, verse one. **“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.”** Pentecost means “fifty.” Exactly fifty days after the resurrection of our Lord the Church was born.

**“To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:
And being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.” (Acts 1:3, 4)**

The Church began fifty days after the resurrection and ten days following His ascension into Heaven. This is the beginning of the Church which Jesus said “I will build.” Although small in number (about 120) it was complete in being. The 120 disciples formed the nucleus of the Church, the Body of Christ. This well known record of the beginning of the Church is recorded in Acts chapter two.

**“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.
And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.**

And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” (Acts 2:1-4)

A baby, when born, is small, however it is complete. It only needs to grow and add millions of cells until it reaches maturity. The same is true of “the Church,” born on the day of Pentecost. This Church has been growing day by day. Man has no say whatsoever about who is added to the Church. The Lord is the One who adds to His Church.

“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:41 and 47)

“And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.” (Acts 5:14)

This has been going on through the ages, and one day the last member will be added to “the Church,” and then the Church will be taken away to be with the Lord.

After the Rapture of the Church, there will be seven years of what the Bible calls “the Great Tribulation.” Then the Lord will come back to earth, with the Church, to destroy the wicked. Then He will set up the long awaited kingdom, promised to the nation of Israel.

“And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.” (Jude 14, 15)

“Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.” (Revelation 20:6)

Of course God knew every member of the Body, called the Church, before the foundation of the world.

“According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by

Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.” (Ephesians 1:4, 5)

This is not difficult to understand if we look at this from God’s perspective and not mans.

“For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.” (I Thessalonians 2:13)

This is confirmed also in Acts 15:18. **“Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.”**

If God in His infinite wisdom knows the beginning to the end, it is no great mystery that He would know all those who are going to put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, and become a part of “the Church.”

God knows the exact number of hairs on the head of every person that has ever been born, or will ever be born. **“But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.” (Matthew 10:30)** Why would anyone doubt that God would not know every person that will be a part of the Body of Christ?

Even though God is omniscient (possesses complete knowledge), His invitation to receive Him is for all.

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Mathew 11:28)

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)

Even though you reject Him, He still died for your sins.

“And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” (I John 2:2)

CHAPTER THREE

The One True Church

In our preceding lessons we introduced five Bible facts concerning the Church revealed by our Lord in Matthew chapter sixteen. We begin this lesson on fact #2. Jesus said, **“...upon this rock I will build MY CHURCH.” (Matthew 16:18)** We see from this Scripture that it is His Church. This means that this Church is beyond any man-made religious organization.

As Christians we should be concerned about man-made religious systems. The Bible warns us time after time about the dangers of these man-made religious systems.

“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s

**clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.”
(Matthew 7:15)**

“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 4:14)

“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.” (II Corinthians 11:13-15)

In spite of all these warnings these man-made, Devil inspired religious organizations still attract a great number of followers, fulfilling the words of Scripture.

“But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.” (II Timothy 3:13)

“A wolf in sheep’s clothing” is a fitting description of these false prophets, according to Matthew chapter seven, verse fifteen. They come posing as Bible believers.

“Sheep” is a term used in the Bible that identifies a true believer; thus these fake, phony hypocrites come in sheep’s clothing to deceive. They tell the unsuspecting that the only way of salvation is to embrace their Devil-inspired, man-made false religious beliefs. Christians are to be aware of these deceivers and heed the words of I John chapter 4, verse 1.

“Beloved, believed not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” (I John 4:1)

Christians do not have to know the doctrines of all these many man-made religions. We only need to know what the Bible teaches about the “true Church.” The Bible, then, becomes the plumb-line by which all doctrines must be measured. Any doctrine that does not measure up to Bible doctrine should be discarded immediately.

We cannot compare truth with error if we do not know the truth. Therefore it becomes very important that we understand what the Bible teaches about the one and only “true Church,” the one that Jesus said He would build.

“We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.” (I John 4:6)

The one true Church is called in Scripture by many different names to designate its origin, relationship, responsibility and destiny. This one true Church is called “the body of Christ,” “the bride of Christ,” “the household of faith,” “God’s building” and

“God’s temple.” It is also called “the Church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven.” It is called “a purchased possession,” “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world.” In the parables it is called “the pearl of great price.”

The one true Church is made up of all who are born again. It is composed of every nation, tongue and tribe. Without membership in this “one true Church” there is no salvation. To be outside of this Church is to be lost forever.

In this lesson when we use the word “church” we are not talking about some building with a steeple, a religious organization, a denomination, or what some call the house of God, but we are speaking of the Bible definition of “the Church.”

Jesus said “I will build MY CHURCH. The very first thing that one must recognize is that Jesus is the Head of His Church.

“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 1:18)

The word “preeminence” means “to be first in rank and influence,” This means that our Lord is to be recognized as having complete authority and control. We should follow His instructions regarding the Church. To follow after any other is to dishonor our Lord who is the Head of the Church.

“And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church.” (Ephesians 1:22)

There is absolutely no doubt as to the Rock upon which His Church was to be built. **“Upon this rock I will build my church.”**

“And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.” (I Corinthians 10:4)

Not only is the Lord Jesus the Head of His Church, He is also the foundation. In our previous lesson we saw the importance of building upon the proper foundation. There is absolutely no doubt as to “who” that foundation is.

“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (I Corinthians 3:11)

“And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.” (Ephesians 2:20)

“Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.” (I Peter 2:6)

We come now to the very heart of this series of lessons, what is the Church? The Bible is clear in its teaching as to what the Church is.

“There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God, and father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” (Ephesians 4:4-6)

This tells us that there is only “one body,” made up of many members. This body is made up of all who are born again, regardless of their denominational affiliation. If this truth was better known and understood, I am sure that it would solve much of the misunderstanding among God’s people.

The Bible is also clear that the true Church is one body, and we are told that this “body” is Christ.

“And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church. Which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all.” (Ephesians 1:22, 23)

“For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.” (Ephesians 5:30)

“Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” (Acts 2:47)

“And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.” (Acts 5:14)

“For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.” (I Corinthians 10:17)

The Scriptures tell us that all believers are “members together that form one body.”

“For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.” (Romans 12:4, 5)

The Bible is also crystal clear as to how one becomes a part of this body. When one becomes a believer they are baptized into the Body of Christ by the Holy Spirit.

**“For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.”
For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body,
whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond**

**or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.
For the body is not one member, but many.”
(I Corinthians 12:12-14)**

The following Scripture tells us that to be a “new creature” we have to be “in Christ.”

**“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature:
old things are passed away; behold, all things are become
new.” (II Corinthians 5:17)**

We become a “new creature” because we are partakers of the Divine nature of Christ.

**“Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious
promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine
nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world
through lust.” (II Peter 1:4)**

The believer becomes a part of the Body of Christ. We then receive the “righteousness of Christ.”

**“And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness,
which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of
Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.”
(Philippians 3:9)**

The Scriptures tell us how we are placed into the body when we receive the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour.

**“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but
according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of
regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost.”
(Titus 3:5)**

**“To whom God would make known what is the riches
of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which
is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” (Colossians 1:27)**

I might add that it is much easier to become a member of “the Church” than to join “a church.”

This Church, the Body of Christ, becomes the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit during the dispensation of Grace. With the birth of the Church, the temple is no longer the place where God meets with His people.

I know this will sound strange to some who still teach that the church building is the temple or storehouse, where one is to bring their tithes and offerings; or the only place where God speaks to the people. However, the Word of God is very clear: **“Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet.” (Acts 7:48)** Shall we let the Word of God settle this question once for all as to God’s dwelling place in the Church age?

“And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” (II Corinthians 6:16)

“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” (I Corinthians 3:16)

**“What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which you have of God, and ye are not your own?
For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.” (I Corinthians 6:19, 20)**

These Scriptures are plain enough for anyone to understand; yet there is more.

**“In whom all the building fitly framed together growth unto an holy temple in the Lord:
In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.” (Ephesians 2:21, 22)**

The word “habitation” means “a dwelling place,” or “to reside.” The Holy Spirit, through true believers make up the “Church,” because they are the “building” in which the Holy Spirit resides. The Believer, then, becomes the instrument that God uses in this “dispensation of grace” to carry out His program. This makes believers the most important force on the face of this earth. This is why Jesus could say **“Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Matthew 18:20)**

CHAPTER FOUR

The True Church Will Survive

In our previous lessons we covered three of the Bible facts concerning the Church. In this, the fourth lessons we will take up Bible fact number four.

“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.” (Mathew 16:18)

Jesus gives one of the most encouraging facts to be found in the Word of God concerning the Church. This fact confirms the truth that “the Church” is beyond any man-made organization.

The “true Church” has been under assault since the day it was founded, fifty days after the resurrection. These attacks come from every quarter, and have always been directed against true believers.

From a casual reading, Acts chapter two to Revelation chapter four, one cannot miss the instrument that God uses to implement His program during the dispensation of

grace. His instrument is a church, a visible assembly, where believers meet for the purpose of carrying out the program and mission commanded by our Lord, the head of the Church.

“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 Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

Acts chapter 2, verse 42, records the first meeting of the first Church in history. Their program was simple. There was none of the pomp and pageantry we see in a lot of church services today.

“And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” (Acts 2:42)

There are four identifying marks that should set the pattern for the Church today.

(1) Meeting together for the teaching of the Word of God. **“They continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine.”** The teaching of the Word of God came first with the early Church. The word “stedfastly” means “to be earnest towards;” “to be diligent.” The word “doctrine” means “teachings.” Teaching the Word of God must be given first priority in the Church.

(2) Meeting together for fellowship. Christian fellowship is very important. D. L. Moody gave a good illustration of this. He said, “A Christian that does not avail themselves of fellowship is like a hot coal that is removed from the fire. It will become cold in a very short time.”

(3) Meeting together for the purpose of “breaking of bread,” (the Lord’s Supper). The Lord’s Supper is a very important ordinance. Jesus said, **“Do this in remembrance of me.”**

(4) Meeting together for “prayer.” I believe if this simple program was followed today the Church would regain some of its lost power and influence.

The rest of the second chapter of Acts, verses 43 through 47, record the wonderful results of the first meeting of the Church. Acts chapter 4, verses 32 through 37 records the same results. Why do we not see the same thing today?

I believe the answer is that the Church, born on the day of Pentecost, was the only Church in history where every one that was assembled was “true believers.” **“And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul.” (Acts 4:32)** Since that time the local, visible assemblies have been made up of both believers (the wheat) and unbelievers (the tares).

All of those who made up the first Church had the new nature of Christ. The only problem, they still had the sinful blood of Adam flowing through their veins. Since they still had the sinful flesh of Adam to contend with, they were still subject to the temptations of the world, the flesh and the Devil.

The world, the flesh and the Devil can not destroy the true Church, those who are a part of the Body of Christ, but they can certainly hinder the progress and power of

the Church by their continual assault upon the visible church assembly where God's people meet.

Before the Lord ever revealed the Church, He warned of three enemies that will do everything within their power to destroy the Church.

(1) The Devil: He uses his power to contaminate the Church by placing tares, (unbelievers imitating true believers).

“But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.” (Matthew 13:25)

**“The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one.
The enemy that sowed them is the devil.” (Matthew 13:38 and 39a)**

There is absolutely no doubt as to who is responsible for this contamination. Tares are not and cannot be members of the “one true “Church,” which is the Body of Christ. However, they can be and are members of the visible church.

Why did this first Church allow these tares to stay among the congregation? Because Jesus said unto them:

**“...An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.
Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.” (Matthew 13:28-30)**

We see from these Scriptures the first outside influence upon the Church was an attempt by the Devil to contaminate the Church with unbelievers. How well he has succeeded is quite evident today.

(2) The Flesh: The corruption of the Church by the flesh is revealed in the parable of the “mustard seed.”

“Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field:” (Matthew 13:31)

We see from this Scripture that the “mustard seed” is a seed that “A MAN took and sowed in HIS FIELD.” The unusual growth from an insignificant seed, the least of all seeds, into a giant tree is abnormal.

The flesh at work becomes so preoccupied with the growth of a religious organization that they will do anything, or accept anything for the sake of growth, even to letting the birds, that removed the “good seed,” find refuge in the branches. When

growth becomes the focus and motive of the Church, it abandons its real mission and ministry, and substitutes all sorts of programs, rituals, ceremonies and entertainment. It becomes no more than a religious social club.

When the Church left the simple program of teaching the Bible, fellowship, observing the Lord's Supper and prayer, it all but abandoned its calling.

The "mustard seed" is nothing more than the sinful, proud flesh corrupting the Church, so they can point to their size as being a blessing from God.

(3) The World: The third enemy revealed by our Lord is the "world." We see this in the compromise taught in the parable of the "leaven."

**"Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened."
(Matthew 13:33)**

The "leaven" was hid (concealed) in three measures of meal. To understand this parable we must first have an understanding of what leaven is. We know that leaven was added to bread to make it taste better. However, leaven, as defined by our Lord, was "evil doctrine."

**"How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees?"
Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees." (Matthew 16:11, 12)**

**"And he charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod."
(Mark 8:15)**

Jesus warned the disciples of three specific, evil doctrines.

1. The doctrine of the Pharisees: "teaching salvation by works."
2. The doctrine of the Sadducees: "an outright denial of the Word of God."
3. The doctrine of the Herodians: Worldliness, and compromise with the world system.

We see all three of these erroneous doctrines present in some form of the religious system today, all in an effort to make the Church more acceptable to the world; however, in spite of all the efforts made by the world, the flesh and the Devil they will not succeed for **"The gates of hell shall not prevail" (overpower)** the "one true Church.

**"...even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;
That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing 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.” (Ephesians 5:25-27)

We close these lessons with Bible fact #5, the requirement for membership in the “one true Church,” the Body of Christ: You become a member by what you believe about Jesus Christ.

Jesus asked His disciples “**Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?**” (Matthew 16:13) The disciples gave different answers. Then He asked His disciples “**But whom say ye that I am?**” (Matthew 16:15).

You see, it is a personal matter. Peter gave the right answer. He said, “**Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.**” (Matthew 16:16)

“Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.” (John 6:68, 69)

There are three simple requirements, called the ABC’s of salvation.

A. Acknowledge that you are a sinner.

“...for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” (Matthew 9: 13b)

“For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” (Luke 19:10)

B. Believe. After you come to the realization that you are lost, you must “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.” You must believe that Jesus is the Son of the living God.

“I say therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.” (John 8:24)

“He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” (John 3:18)

“For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.” (Ephesians 2:8)

C. Confession.

“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” (Romans 10:9, 10)

