

"The Church Jesus Built"

With so many churches in town, how do we know which one is what God wants? Hello, I'm Phil Sanders and this is a Bible study, "In SEARCH of the Lord's Way." Today we're examining the church Jesus built as it is described in the Scriptures, so stay with us.

Welcome to In Search of the Lord's Way where we search God's Word. The Lord Jesus in Matthew 23:34 promised to send forth prophets, wise men, and scribes, who would teach His will but suffer persecution. The Lord wasn't content for His Word merely to be spoken. He sent scribes to record His words for all time, and His teaching is found in the New Testament. Thanks for taking time with us today and studying what the Lord says. We want to part of your life each week.

Now, occasionally someone asks me, "Well what does your church teach about...?," and he mentions a topic. They ask because they're curious and interested. I appreciate the question, but I must first explain. The church Jesus built doesn't have some board that directs official doctrine. It doesn't have a hierarchy of men with a humanly written church manual or creed. No, the Lord never instructed the church to make its own policy. Why? Because the only head of the church is Jesus Christ Himself. He said in Matthew 28 and verse 18, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." And , He instructed His apostles in verse 20 to make disciples and teach "them to observe all that I have commanded you." You see what He taught was for every age and the whole world.

The church Jesus built learns its doctrine from the Lord and the Scriptures. The church has no authority to develop doctrines. No human or group of humans can overrule, edit, or change what the Lord teaches. The church draws its beliefs and practices from the Lord and from the inspired teaching found in the Bible. So when someone asks what the church teaches, I point them instead to what the Lord teaches in Scripture. The Lord Jesus said in John 12 verse 48 that he will judge us by His words. Well if that's true—and it is, let's listen to Him.

Now if you want to study more about this topic, we offer the information on this program free. And we're offering a free booklet "Christ's Glorious Church". If you'd like to have a copy of it or a CD of our study, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also stream this program on our website at www.searchtv.org.

The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from Matthew 16 verses 15-19, and explore the church that Jesus built.

Our reading today comes from gospel according to Matthew chapter 16 verses 15-19 and Jesus is asking a question. "He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven. I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven." That's a reading from God's holy word. Let's pray together. Father, we're grateful for the joy we have in Christ and for the promises that you give to us. Father, we're thankful that your son Jesus built his church and that we can be a part of it. May you will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven. In Jesus' name, amen.

If you open the yellow pages, there are numerous churches; and they have different names, beliefs, organizations, and practices. Now, since churches aren't all alike, it poses a problem to those who're searching for an authentic church that follows the Bible. Churches of today differ greatly from the

church you read about in the New Testament. They differ in belief, practice, name, organization, worship, and even their source of authority.

The Lord Jesus never intended His church to be so divided or so mixed up with human ideas and ways. He wanted His people to be one and to follow Him. My heart longs to be a member of the church that Jesus built, the one He purchased with His own blood. That church belongs only to Jesus; the church is made up of people who belong to Him. And since we are His, we need to follow Him and Him alone. We must not be trapped by human beliefs or practices that ignore His teaching.

The word "church," (ekklesia) means "a called out assembly" (that is a group of people called together for a purpose). Now, Christians have been called by the gospel to serve Jesus. When the New Testament uses the word church, it never refers to a building. There were no public church buildings for more than a hundred years after the church began. No, the word "church" refers to people. Acts 8 and verse 3 describes the church this way: "But Saul began ravaging the church, and then it says entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison." You see the church in the first century was made up of men and women. The New Testament never speaks of little children as members of the church.

God calls people to be members of the church through preaching and teaching the gospel. Paul said to the church at Thessalonica in 2 Thessalonians 2 verses 13-14, he says this "But we should always give thanks to God for you, beloved brethren by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." You see people enter the church when they hear the truth and put their faith in the Lord.

Now, sometimes the word "church" is used in a universal sense, speaking of every person who belongs to the Lord and has his name written in the Lamb's book of life. For instance, Jesus said in Matthew 16:18 that He would build His church. Now, in this sense, every person who is saved by the blood of Christ has been added to the church He built. The Bible says in Ephesians 5 and verse 23, "For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself *being* the Savior of the body." Now, the church is indeed made up of those whom Jesus has saved. The Lord has added every saved person to His church, that is His body.

Now, used in this universal sense, the word "church" never refers to some nebulous collection of denominations and sects. No. Rather it refers to those who have obeyed the Lord according to the teaching of Scripture. The church is not denominational or interdenominational; the church Jesus built is actually undenominational. The New Testament has no concept whatsoever of the denominationalism that's prevalent in our world today. Now, in the New Testament, the church was merely the church.

Sometimes the word "church" is used in reference to a local congregation as in 1 Corinthians 1 and verse 2, where Paul writes "To the church of God that is in Corinth." Now, when Paul speaks of "churches," that is in the plural, he's not talking about different denominations with different doctrines and practices but rather different individual congregations in different locations. For instance, in Galatians 1 and verse 2 Paul wrote to the "churches of Galatia." These were local congregations in the various cities of the province of Galatia. They believed the same gospel, they practiced the same things, and they fellowshiped each other as brethren in the universal church.

Now, sometimes the word "church" has reference to the assembly of a local congregation. That's when they gather. Paul spoke of the Corinthians coming together as a church in 1 Corinthians 11 and verse 18. And in 1 Corinthians 14 verse 34 he said to the women that they are to "keep silent in the

churches,” that is when the church is gathered. Referring to the time when the church gathered as a congregation for worship. The very word “church” implies a calling together of people for a purpose. And being part of the church means one assembles together with other Christians and they do it for the purpose of worship.

Now, the Lord Jesus is deeply tied to His church. Our relationship with Lord is always in the context of being part of His church. The Lord Jesus and His church are inseparable.

First, we must realize the Lord built His church. Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, “I will build my church.” The Lord’s church can never belong to men. People are not the builder of the church, they are what is built. They are the stones in the building. 1 Peter 2 verses 4-5 says, “As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious,” He said “you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” Now, our task is to function as living stones in what the Lord has built.

Second, Jesus purchased the church. The apostle Paul told the elders of the church at Ephesus in Acts 20:28, “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” Now, Jesus didn’t purchase the church with gold or silver but with His own blood. Jesus must love and treasure the church beyond measure to sacrifice Himself for it. You may not think much of the church, but Jesus laid down His life so that He might purchase it.

Third, the Lord is the head of His church. Ephesians 1 verses 22–23 says that God “put all things in subjection under His [that is Jesus’] feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” Now, God likens the relationship of Jesus to the church like a head to the body. The two are inseparable. And Jesus instructs and works through His body, the church, in this world today. Now, all authority resides in Him, that is Jesus, as the head. And if He’s to work in your life and mine, that means we must listen to Him and obey Him.

Fourth, the church is the bride of Christ. Ephesians 5 verses 25–27 says, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.” The relationship of Christ to His church is like that of a husband to his wife. Notice Jesus has but one wife. He has only one church.

This passage teaches just how much Jesus cherishes the church and how He has made the church holy and blameless by the washing of water with the word, that’s baptism by the way. No husband would tolerate someone abusing or slandering his wife, and neither will the Lord Jesus tolerate someone slandering or abusing His church.

Now, the Scriptures describe the church Jesus built as a family with God as our Father, and Jesus as our Lord and older brother, and us as brothers and sisters. Paul wrote to Timothy in 1 Timothy 3 verses 14–15, “I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed,” he says “I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household (or the family) of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.” Now, a household in Biblical times was a family living together, loving and supporting one another, the older taking care and training the younger in the ways of the Lord.

And the Scriptures also describe the church as a kingdom. The Lord's church is not a democracy, no; people can't vote on Jesus or on His teaching. Jesus is already the only King and Lord of His church. Only He can make laws for the church.

In Acts 20 and verse 28 the Bible says Jesus purchased the church with His blood, but in Revelation 5 verses 9-10 the Lord purchased people to be a kingdom. According to the New American Standard and other versions. Paul said in Colossians 1:13-14 that God "rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." My friends, the church is the kingdom of God on earth today. And if you wish to go to God's heavenly kingdom, you must enter God's earthly kingdom, the church. We enter that kingdom by being born of water and the Spirit according John 3 and verse 5. That new birth takes place when people who believe and love the Lord repent of their sins and are baptized into Christ Jesus.

The Scriptures also describe the church as God's dwelling place, the temple of God. The apostle Paul told the church at Ephesus in Ephesians 2 verses 19-22, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." Oh, God dwells in His people, and He expects them to be holy servants.

Now, in the New Testament Christians were merely "Christians." God didn't approve of divisions among them. He never suggested or permitted man-made names, creeds, practices, or even a hierarchy. They simply followed the Lord and held fast to the teaching. Christians simply lived holy lives, they worshiped according to the teaching of Christ, and served the Lord by preaching the truth and being zealous for good deeds. God's people love the Lord and love each other. They share the gospel, help the needy, and follow Jesus Christ. They have strong faith and will not give in to the devil or to the world.

And what was true in the first century is also true today. You can be a member of the church Jesus built by reading and following the Lord's instructions in the New Testament. And if you follow Christ, you'll reject every man-made belief and practice. Jesus said His true disciples would stay in His teaching. And this is how He distinguishes the true disciples from other people. He said in John 8:31-32, that "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." Now, truth and freedom aren't found in the traditions or commandments of men. No, they are not. They aren't found in religious groups established by men. No. If you want the blessing of the Lord, come to the Lord. Follow the Lord's way found in Scripture.

Now, the Lord Jesus said in John 12 and verse 48, that "He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day." It just makes sense to do God's will and follow the Bible in everything we teach or do. Being in the church Jesus built means giving up every man-made doctrine, idea, practice, name, or organization. It means carefully obeying what Jesus commands. The church of Christ, the church Jesus purchased with His own blood, is God's idea; and God invites you to be a member of it. The church always has an open door—there's room for you in God's family. Why not come to the Lord? And do it today. Let's pray together. Oh Father we're thankful to be members of your family and to be able to be a part of your temple the church. And Father help each one to love you and to serve you and to want to belong to you and to be a part of that family. And may your will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven. In Jesus' name, amen.

To be in the church Jesus built is a great privilege! It means His blood purchased you, and you belong to Him. It means that He has saved you and made you one of His family. It means every promise and blessing given in Scripture is a promise you can claim! Now, we can be true and authentic Christians only by returning to the Lord and His teaching. 1 John 2 verses 5–6 says, “whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.” If you love the Lord, walk in His commandments.

Now, I hope your heart longs to hear His voice and serve the Lord. Put the Lord and His ways first in your heart and life. I hope your heart aches to be right with the Lord. 1 Thessalonians 5:21–22 says, “But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil.” Turn away from man-made religion, which has empty promises, and come back to God. God’s ways are always right.

You can’t join the church Jesus built; the Lord must add you to it. And if you’ll hear the gospel, believe with all your heart, turn away from sin, and out of love confess Jesus as the Christ, then you’re ready to take the step where the Lord adds you to His church. That step is baptism, an immersion in water in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. It’s simple! So do what Peter told the people to do at the beginning in Acts 2:38, “repent, and be baptized.” And just as the Lord added the people in those days according to Acts 2 verses 41 and 47, He will add you to His church.

Well we hope today’s study about the church has stirred your heart. Now, we’re offering this free booklet, “The Church Jesus Built,” or a CD of this message, and it’s free. So mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org.

Or, you can call the Search office toll-free our number is 1-800-321-8633. Now, our programs appear on our website at www.searchtv.org or on YouTube. For a deeper study of God’s Word, we offer Bible Correspondence courses. And if you want one, let us know. If you call us we won’t ask you for money or put you on a list.

But we do ask that you please get involved with a church of Christ, the church Jesus built. They love you and they’ll welcome you. If you’re looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we’ll be happy to help you find one. Well we’ll be glad to see you again next week, so tune in to us, Lord willing we’ll be back. Keep searching God’s Word with us and tell a friend. God bless you and we love you from all of us, In Search of the Lord’s Way.