



“The Church that Jesus Built”

Part II

Kevin Presley

Thousands of people were added to the church that Jesus built on the day of Pentecost after hearing Peter preach the first gospel sermon. That was in Jerusalem, just seven weeks after Jesus was crucified and rose again. And during the almost four decades that followed, the church enjoyed explosive growth. It was one body of believers who turned the world upside down for the Lord Jesus Christ. The gospel that they preached in one city was the same that they preached in the next. You didn't have hundreds of churches preaching hundreds of gospels and practicing hundreds of various doctrines and ideas, but rather one church preaching one gospel. And when people obeyed that gospel, they became numbered among the one and only church that Jesus established. That's the way the Lord intended it, and that's the way it should be today. Sadly, it's not, in the eyes of the world. Look at what the record says.

Acts 2:47 “...And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”

They didn't go join a church of their choice, because there weren't *churches* to choose from. The Lord had HIS church and He added people to it when they obeyed the gospel. This mighty army called the church invaded the earth, as it were, with the convincing message of Christ, and their unity of purpose and message was one of the major contributors to their evangelistic success.

Well, today people are cynical about religion and it's no wonder, because the so-called Christian community has divided and segregated itself into hundreds—no, thousands of parties and denominations so that people are confused as to what to believe. They don't even bother anymore to say that you have to believe anything. There are churches meeting in every neighborhood in America today that represent a myriad of beliefs and practices, and trying to find the simple truth on the New Testament in that kind of environment seems to be like looking for the proverbial needle in a haystack. I heard a story a long time ago about a group of people going to California during the gold rush. They got lost in the wilderness and went for several hours without finding water until they finally came across a stream. They were relieved, and they lined the bank and cupped their hands together, drawing water to

drink. But the water was bitter and so polluted that they couldn't drink it. They sat down and gave up. One of the men wandered off and began to explore the surrounding terrain. He went up the hill a good ways, and suddenly came to a clear bubbling spring. It looked so good! He knelt down and drew the water to his lips and it was clean and refreshing. So excited, he went to get the others, and as he did, he noticed that the stream was taking him in the direction of where he had begun, and just a short distance away, he saw a tiny stream trickling into the creek that they had drunk from. He went a little farther and saw another small tributary emptying into the stream, and he had discovered where the bitter and polluting elements were coming from. When he reached the others, he told them about the spring and said that they were drinking too far below the fountain. So they went up to the spring and drank its waters and survived to tell the story.

Well, there are a lot of people today who draw from the stream of modern religion and they find it very bitter, and frankly, undrinkable. So they turn in disgust and walk away from Christ all together. You know, someone needs to take them by the hand and tell them that they're drinking too far below the fountain. They need to hear about the spring of living water that began long before men dumped their own doctrines and practices into the stream and polluted it. That spring is the New Testament. If we will truly lay aside the prejudices and the preconceived ideas that go along with denominationalism and sectarianism today, and simply accept and practice only what is recorded in the New Testament, then we can be saved and we can know that we are drinking from the pure and unpolluted wells of Christianity.

In this study, we are learning about the church as it existed before men departed the ancient faith and established all of these so-called churches that we see around us today. I believe that that ancient church still exists, and that you and I can find it and be members of it. I know that it remains in the world because of what the Hebrew writer said.

Hebrews 12:28 "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear:"

Again, when the angel told Mary of the Christ child that she would bear, look what he said.

Luke 1:31-33 "And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end."

Remember our text from the first part of our study.

Matthew 16:18 "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. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven:"

So, the kingdom that Jesus talked about establishing, the kingdom over which Jesus reigns, is very much alive today. We just simply must learn how to recognize it and seek it out. Jesus said that the word of God is the seed of that kingdom.

Luke 8:11 "Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God."

Since every seed produces after its own kind, we know that the word of God will only produce one kind of fruit. How then can several people hear and heed the word of God and the result be Christians of varying denominations? Let's take a look at some of the fruit that the seed of the kingdom produces, and see if we can identify the church that Jesus built, and tell it apart from the many churches that men have built in the world today.

Last week, we pointed out that Jesus only promised to build one church: His church. In our first study, we looked in depth at the origin of the church of Christ, and we began to examine the doctrines and practices of the early church. That's where we'll pick up our study today.

III. Pattern

The scriptures teach us that the Holy Spirit furnished the church of the first century with a pattern for work and worship.

Acts 2:42 "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."

The phrase "*continued stedfastly*" comes from a Greek word that means "to be earnest towards a thing, to attend decidedly, to adhere closely to a thing." In other words, the church of that day was very careful and very faithful to follow the doctrine and teachings of the apostles. They didn't swerve from the pattern originally given to them by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. One church made the mistake of doing so, and Paul rebuked them. For all of those who say it doesn't matter how one worships God, they need to hear Paul's admonishment to the church at Corinth. That church had allowed their assemblies to become chaotic and disorderly, and they were abusing the sacred observance of the Lord's supper. Paul plainly rebuked these erring brethren:

I Corinthians 11:2 "Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you."

They were to strictly follow the teachings of Paul in every respect. Remember what Jesus told the woman at the well.

John 4:23-24 "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

In other words, our worship must not only engage our inner man in sincere service, but it must also be according to what God has revealed and commanded, according to truth. If it's not, then it is vain worship, and is unacceptable to the Father. The church that Jesus built adhered closely to the teachings and practices of the apostles. That's why many who are identified as the churches of Christ today are so different in practice from the denominations about us.

You know, if you've ever visited an assembly of the church of Christ, you were probably struck by the fact that the congregation didn't use a mechanical instrument to accompany their singing. You'll notice in the singing that we show you here on this program that there are no pianos, no organs, no drums or bands. Just a cappella singing. Have you ever investigated why that is? Sacred history reveals that instrumental music was foreign to the early church. We do read of instruments of music in the days of

David in the Old Testament system of worship, but by the time the New Testament church was established, they were not used in worship. Not only does the New Testament make no mention whatsoever of mechanical instruments in the worship of the early church, secular history verifies that they were not used in worship until more than 600 years after the establishment of the church. They were introduced by the Roman Catholic church in 670 A.D. and it wasn't until 800 A.D. when it became the common practice of the Catholic church. If we're going to restore the church of the first century, the church that Jesus built, we're going to have to get away from Rome, and go back to Jerusalem where the law of the Lord was first declared.

Ephesians 5:19 “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;”

He didn't say “making melody on the strings of an instrument.” The *psallo*-ing or “*making melody*” that is to take place here is to be done in our heart, on our heartstrings if you please. The melody is to be made there, and not on the strings of a mechanical instrument. It's important that we follow the New Testament pattern.

Colossians 3:17 “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.”

That's a Bible command. We're all familiar with the phrase “in the name of,” and that implies “with the authority” to do something. If the police are trying to gain entry into a house, they may beat on the door and say, “Open up, in the name of the law!” meaning they have the legal backing to demand entrance into that residence. Jesus said as much of Himself.

Matthew 28:18 “...All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.”

So, if Jesus has all power and authority, and Paul said that whatever we do is to be done “*in the name of (or by the authority)*” of Him, do we dare bring worship to the Lord that He never asked for? Let's look at another practice of the early disciples: the “*breaking of bread*” or the Lord's Supper. Look again at **Acts 2:42**.

“And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”

Luke tells us there that the early church “*continued stedfastly*” in that practice. When Paul was visiting the church at Troas, the scriptures tell us that he delayed his departure until after the Lord's Day so as to meet with the disciples and “*break bread*” with them.

Acts 20:7 “And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.”

The first day of every week was a special day to the early church—just as it is to the churches of Christ today, because it was the day they came together and broke bread and communed. How can any church follow the example of the early disciples and NOT come together on the Lord's Day to break bread? You know, a lot of churches eat the Lord's Supper on a very sporadic and occasional basis: monthly, quarterly, semi-annually or yearly. But that wasn't the practice of the church that Jesus built. Most

churches of our day don't even observe the memorial supper in the way that Jesus instituted it. They violate the divine pattern and have substituted another practice.

There are four accounts written down by inspiration of the Holy Spirit as to what took place the night that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper with His disciples. Those events are recorded in **Matthew 26**, **Mark 14**, **Luke 22** and **I Corinthians 11**. All four records give us a parallel accounting of what Jesus did then. They all tell us that Jesus took a loaf of unleavened bread and He made it to represent His body, He blessed it, partook of it and gave it to the disciples to partake of. He then took a cup containing the fruit of the vine, gave thanks for it, drank out of it, gave it to His disciples and told them to drink it in remembrance of His blood of the New Testament, and the scriptures tell us that *they all drank of it*. By the way, the Greek word there for "of" is "ek" which means "from or out of." They drank *from* what Jesus gave to them. That's what the Bible says happened.

But men today have changed that simple and beautiful design of our Lord. In your investigation of the church that Jesus built, I want to challenge you to read very carefully with an open heart and an open mind all four accounts, and see if the pattern is in strict agreement with the practice of most churches today.

IV. Organization/Government

One more characteristic of the first century church is its organization and its government. The Bible clearly states that Jesus is the head of the church. ALL authority belongs to Him, and the church is subject to none but Christ. That's one reason that I'm so opposed to denominationalism with its creeds and governing councils and conventions and church hierarchies. The scripture nowhere even hints at the concept of a worldwide pope ruling over the church, for example. Peter wasn't a pope! He was an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, just like Paul and the others. The Bible says nothing of the Lord's church having any earthly headquarters or government outside of the leadership of each local congregation. The only thing that governed them outside of the local congregation was the word of the apostles, which we still have today, the word of God.

But not long after the church was established, religious history traces the gradual departure from the autonomy of the local church and the simple pattern for church government. Not long after the days of the apostles, leaders over local churches began to oversee the affairs and business of congregations besides their own, and that eventually led to a hierarchy of power that blossomed into Roman Catholicism, with a pope governing over the universal church. Well, that was never in God's plan. You'll never read in the scriptures how the church universally had ANY organization or government over it besides the universal authority of Christ as head of the church. Consequently, when this foreign system of government sprang up and the church became apostate, there were men making all kinds of decisions and bringing in all manner of practice and doctrines that were NEVER preached, bound or taught by the Lord's apostles.

This is God's pattern: in every local church, elders were appointed to lead or shepherd that group of believers.

Acts 14:22-23 "Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed."

So, every church had their own elders, and their authority extended no further than the church which they were ordained to lead. There was no government higher than them to which they had to account, other than the Lord Himself.

Denominationalism is a corruption of the New Testament pattern for the organization and government of the church. Think about it. What is a 'denomination' anyway? The word itself implies 'parts that make up a whole.' Like different denominations of coins make up a dollar. The system of denominationalism doesn't even fit the Bible definition and usage of the word 'church.' What is the universal church? It's simply made up of every baptized believer in the world. It has no official organization or function assigned to it. The church merely describes all of those who are saved in Christ Jesus through obedience to the truth. According to the Bible, those believers are bound together in local autonomous churches overseen by their own elders and deacons.

Here's the thing: a denomination is smaller than the universal church. Why? Because denominations claim that they're only one part of the universal church, and they think there are saved people in nearly every denomination. So it's smaller than the universal church. Yet, it's larger than the local church because it takes several local churches to make up a denomination. So, it's too small to be the universal church and too large to be the local church. In other words, it's an unscriptural concept to its very core. Friend, churches of Christ don't represent a denomination. We have no earthly headquarters. We have no presidents, no conventions, no councils, no human creeds, charters or bylaws. We're simply individual congregations of baptized believers who are seeking to follow the teachings of the New Testament. We are bound together only by our relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ and the "*like precious faith*" which Peter spoke of in **II Peter 1:1**.

I'm happy to tell you that New Testament Christianity can be practiced in the world today. Did you know that you—even you—can be the beginning of a congregation of the Lord's church in the very community in which you live? To do that, you have to lay aside the traditions and the doctrines of men, and the divisive loyalties to denominations and human creeds. You must be willing to take only the Bible, to follow its teachings and the examples of the early church in faith and practice, to call for a "thus saith the Lord"-- in the work, worship, preaching and organization of the church. You must be willing to lay aside the sectarian and party names and affiliations, and resign yourself to be a Christian only, after the New Testament order.

Are you willing to do that? Are you willing to take a stand for the church that Jesus built? If you've never obeyed that ancient gospel that was first preached in Jerusalem, that's where you start. Would you do what they did on the day of Pentecost when Peter took the keys of the kingdom and preached the laws of pardon and admission to Christ's kingdom?

Acts 2:38 "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

Acts 2:41,47 "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls...And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."

I hope you'll do that today, and strike hands and hearts with us upon nothing more or less than the word of truth. I hope these studies will prompt you to open up God's word and do a very sincere and serious study about the church that Jesus built. Eternity is too long and our souls are too precious. The church is too important and the truth is too vital for us to merely shrug our shoulders and say, "Well, it

really doesn't matter. One is just the same as another." No, one church is not the same as another. That's why we have so many different churches in the world today. But you can seek out the church that Jesus built, and be a part of that church by obedience to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

©2020 BibleWay Media. All rights reserved.
BibleWay Media grants permission to copy this material for personal use. Permission is also granted to distribute this transcript as long as it is reproduced in its entirety, used solely for its original purpose of spreading the gospel, and attribution is given to the author and Let the Bible Speak.