

## **Who Built the Church?**

In the New Testament one reads about the church. For example, Paul wrote that the house of God "is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). When reflecting on his personal unworthiness to be an apostle, Paul acknowledged, "I persecuted the church of God" (1 Cor. 15:9). Who built this church which is mentioned, described, and discussed on the pages of apostolic writings?

Not Martin Luther - There is a church that wears the name of Luther; however, that church is not revealed in the New Testament. Martin Luther was not born until A.D. 1483. That is more than fourteen hundred years too late for him to have been the founder of the New Testament church. No matter how much we may admire Luther for his sparking the great Reformation in Germany, we dare not exalt him unduly. The church described in the Bible existed for centuries before Luther nailed his ninety-five theses on the door of the Wittenberg Cathedral and broke away from Roman Catholicism. One may read about Christians in the New Testament but not about Lutherans.

Not John and Charles Wesley - The Methodist Church traces its origin back to the Wesley brothers, but they lived in the 18th century. Methodism had its roots in the Church of England. King Henry VIII had separated the English or Anglican Church from the control of the Pope of Rome in 1534. It was about two centuries later that the Wesleys organized societies that developed into the Methodist Church. The church of the New Testament was in existence in the first century. It was never referred to as the Methodist Church. The Wesleys could not have been the builders of the church of the Bible.

Not Alexander Campbell - Born in the late 18th century, Alexander Campbell was a 19th century religious reformer. His quest for truth led him from the Presbyterians into close union with Baptists and then to bitter controversies with Presbyterians, Baptists, and other denominational leaders. Campbell pleaded with people to return to the ancient order of things. He urged individuals and congregations to discard from their faith and practice everything that is not found written in the New Testament of the Lord and Savior. Some of his positions in later years did not measure up to his plea. Whatever one may think of Campbell and his efforts, he came on the scene much too late to be the builder of the New Testament church. He made no claim to being the founder of the church described in the Bible.

Jesus Christ - In Matthew 16:18, after Peter had confessed him to be the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus said, ". . . And upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." This passage clearly identifies Jesus Christ as the builder of the New Testament church.

Jesus "purchased" the church with his own blood (Acts 20:28). He paid the price that there might be a called out body of people, a redeemed race, a chosen generation. He "loved the church" and gave himself for it (Eph. 5:25). The church belongs to him. It does not belong to Abraham, Moses, Solomon, Elijah, John the Baptist, Luther, Wesley, Campbell, or any other man. The church is Christ's own purchased possession; it is peculiarly his.

Jesus is "the head of the church" (Eph. 5:23). He became its head after being exalted to the right hand of the Father in heavenly places (Eph. 1:20-23). Since the church is the body of people belonging to Christ, he is "the head of the body, the church" (Col. 1:18).

It is the Lord who adds people to the church (Acts 2:47). Obedience to the gospel results in salvation, and the church is composed of the saved. Jesus taught that people must believe and be baptized to be saved (Mark 16:15-16). We are "baptized into one body" (1 Cor. 12:13). Jesus Christ established the New Testament church through the preaching of the apostles. All who respond to the gospel by obeying from the heart are brought under his headship and become a part of the glorious body which is his church.

Men have built numerous religious bodies, but no man is capable of building what the Lord established. Man may build something and call it a "church." However attractive it may be, no man-made church is equal to or a suitable substitute for the church built by Christ.

*- by Irvin Himmel*

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***Mysteries of Life***

Once when I was going to Columbus, Ohio, I stopped to eat in a restaurant and ordered a slice of watermelon. I took the seeds home with me to plant in my garden.

That night a thought came to my mind. How many watermelon seeds would it take to make a pound? The next day I weighed them and found that it would take about 5,000 dried seeds.

A few weeks later I planted just one of the little seeds. Under the influence of sunshine and shower, that little seed had taken off its coat and gone to work. It had gathered from somewhere two hundred thousand times its own weight and forced that enormous weight through a tiny stem and built a watermelon. On the outside it has a covering of green and within that a rind of white and within that a core of red; and then it had scattered through the red many little seeds, each one capable of doing the same work over again.

What architect drew the plan? Where did the little watermelon seed get its strength? Where did it find its flavoring extract, and its coloring matter? How did it build a watermelon?

Until you can explain a watermelon, do not be too sure that you can set limits to the power of the Almighty. The most learned men in the world cannot explain the watermelon, but the most ignorant man can eat a watermelon and enjoy it. God has given us the knowledge necessary to use these things, and the truth that he has revealed to us is infinitely more important for our welfare than it would be to understand the mysteries that he has seen fit to conceal from our faltering view.

*- by William Jennings Bryan*

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## ***Simple Steps in the Plan of Salvation***

Through the years various analogies have been used by gospel preachers to represent the plan of salvation. Some have referred to it as rungs on a ladder, or steps in a stairway. One well remembered evangelist would frequently compare the plan of salvation to a combination lock. He would explain that each step had to be taken in the right order – just like entering the numbers on the combination lock – or success could not be achieved.

It seems that we've often gotten away from such simple preaching of the gospel fundamentals. God has made His plan so plain that folks with the most basic of reasoning abilities can understand it. Yet it seems that too often we've failed to really educate people with the most important and basic facts concerning their souls and eternity. We need to get back to those "first principles," and teach them in a way that can not be misunderstood.

And, in case you've forgotten, here is that "combination" for salvation ...

- Hear the word (Romans 10:17)
- Believe (Hebrews 11:6)
- Repent of sins (Luke 13:3)
- Confess faith in Jesus (Romans 10:10)
- Be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38)

Every Christian should know this plan by heart, and be ready to share it with others. And anyone who has not obeyed these simple steps needs to carefully study the scriptures and obey without further delay. It's God's plan - very simple - ultimately important!

*- by Greg Gwin*