

“I Will Build My Church”

Introduction: There is a confusing array of churches (2500 distinct forms of Christianity in America – Phyllis Tickle, *Rediscovering the Sacred*, 1995) all claiming to operate with Christ’s blessings. What exactly did Jesus build?

1. “I Will Build My Church” – Mt 16:18

A. A universal/local body of believers.

1. Before Pentecost, the kingdom of God/heaven was near: Mk 1:14-15; Mk 9:1 (“... *there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power*”); Lk 11:20 (“*But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you*”).
2. After Pentecost, those who came to believe in Christ were identified as the “church”: Ac 5:11; 8:1 (“*the church which was at Jerusalem*”); 9:31 (“*the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria ...*”).
3. Jesus said, “*The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you*” (Lk 17:20-21). The kingdom of Christ is visibly manifested in the lives of people who willingly submit to His rule. As they associate locally for work and worship, they are identified as “a church of Christ.” Acts chronicles the development of this kingdom throughout the Roman world.

B. There are certain *essentials* that make a church of Christ distinct.

1. **Illus:** McDonald’s in London, Bertchesgaden (Germany) and Bergen (Norway). Local franchises must meet parent company standards: approved suppliers, cooking appliances/methods; employee training, etc. This produces a uniformity of essence which allows the McDonald name/logo to be used. Restaurants may have different décor, building structure, uniforms but **still a McDonalds:** Big Macs, Quarter Pounders, Chicken McNuggets – *not Whoppers*.
2. Jesus is the head of **His** church (Eph 1:20-23). When churches act according to the head, there will be similarity of worship, doctrine and practice. When they don’t, there will be unauthorized diversity. **Illus:** All restaurants are similar in that they serve food, provide utensils, have kitchens/bathrooms/tables/chairs/cashiers, etc. *But this does not make any restaurant a McDonalds!*
3. Paul warns against “*not holding fast to the head*” (Col 2:19).

- C. Two sources of authority: heaven and men (Mt 21:25). Religious groups built according to man's blueprints, to suit man's purposes, using man's methods are not churches of *Christ*, they are churches of *men*.

2. Some Fundamental Principles

- A. Congregational autonomy **must** be respected.

1. There is no organizational structure of the Lord's church above the congregational level. Leadership invested in elders/shepherds/overseers is limited to a local church – "*Shepherd the flock of God which is among you*" (1 Pet 5:2).
2. The corruption of organizational structure is precisely where Satan infiltrated communities of believers late in the first century. A hierarchy among leaders was already developing which eventually led to a "denominational" view of the church. Eventually, decisions were made on regional, provincial and universal bases to the degree that local autonomy became non-existent.
3. This is lost on those of the present generation who involve themselves in cooperative efforts. When local churches begin acting as a unit, when funds are pooled in "sponsoring churches," when decisions are made for a church by some other entity, then brethren are repeating the apostate history of the early church.

- B. Unity is **essential** to the proper functioning of the local church.

1. A local church is diverse. It is comprised of those who hypocritically serve God, the spiritually mature/immature, those of differing social/economic/intellectual resource, and people with an abundance of quirks, peculiarities, opinions and judgments.
2. The Corinthians were: sectarian (1 Cor 1:10-17; 3:1-17), litigious (6:1-8), differing in conscience (8:1-7; 10:23-33), class conscious (11:17-34), selfishly ambitious in worship (14:26-40), etc.
3. Unity is achieved through hard work and application of scriptural principle. Paul urged the Corinthians to work for unity by being of the same mind and judgment on matters involving the true value of a man (1 Cor 1:10) and doctrinal essentials (4:17), forgiveness toward the penitent (see 2 Cor 2:5-8 in reference to the incestuous brother of 1 Cor 5), putting self aside and seeking the edification of others (8:12-13; 9:19-23; 10:23-24) and showing love (13:1-7).

- C. Collective or congregational activities are a *supplement to* not a *substitute for* individual action. "Institutional" churches of Christ have gotten to their present state of affairs by burdening the church with personal matters. We must not do the

same thing with a “let somebody else do it” mentality.

1. Parents must not rely on the local church to do *all* the teaching of their children. Likewise, adults must not let collective class studies be the whole of their study and meditation upon the Scriptures.
2. Public worship does not preclude private acts of worship: prayer, singing, etc. Do we engage in any private devotion on our “own time”?
3. The process of laying aside funds for the meeting of collective responsibilities does not fully discharge the individual’s obligation to serve his fellow man.

3. The Challenge of Being Different

- A. Those who strive to adhere to Bible authority for their beliefs and practices are being pushed further and further to the fringe of modern “Christianity.” The leadership of women, acceptance of practicing homosexuals and an all-out attack upon the authority/legitimacy of the Bible are potentially explosive issues that will force themselves upon us in one form or another.
- B. As time progresses, we must remain unique (while not unduly making ourselves offensive) and prepare ourselves to suffer persecution if necessary.
- C. If we live long enough to see the wrath of God come upon our nation for our ungodliness, as always that judgment “*will begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?*” (1 Pet 4:17).

Conclusion: Before Jesus pronounced His judgments upon His enemies in Revelation, He warned His churches to “get their acts together.” Is PSD what a local congregation of God’s people ought to be? Are you committed to remaining true to the Lord regardless of the consequences?