

High Peaks Bible Fellowship

Christ's Teaching About the Church

Introduction

Examining Christ's words

- As we begin this study of the church, we want to determine exactly what the Word of God says on this subject. We would think that to get the definitive word about what the church is to do and to be, then we should go to the words of Christ Himself.
- In this session, that is exactly what we will do -- examine the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ concerning the church.
- One thing that may surprise us is that Jesus' teaching about the church is very limited. He did not provide much direct guidance about the church, so we need to clearly understand what He *did* say as well as why He did not say *more*.



Christ's prophecy of the church

Jesus' first use of the word "church"

- Matthew 16:18
"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."
- Here Jesus used the *future* tense to refer to the church. Did the church exist at the time Jesus spoke these words? No. Jesus made it clear that He had every intention of building the church at some time in the future, and He implied that Peter and the other disciples would someday have a part in it.
- Therefore, in Jesus' first mention of the *church* we have His promise that at some future time He would bring it into existence.

Christ hinted about this future fellowship

The illustration of the flock of sheep

- Chapter Ten of the Gospel of John records the illustration:
"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd." (John 10:11-16)
- Jesus used the *future* tense in John 10:16 to say that there are other sheep which do not belong to this fold, and "they will hear My voice and they will become one flock." Jesus hinted about other sheep which will become part of the one flock, but He gave no details about when or how this would happen -- only that it will happen in the future.

Christ instituted specific practices

Conflict Resolution

- In Matthew 18:15-17 Jesus taught about conflict resolution:
"If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector." (Matthew 18:15-17)
- This is the second passage in the gospel record where the word "church" was used, and it is the *only* other place where Jesus used the word "church" in any of His teaching.
- Was Jesus building His church at the time He spoke these words? No. The existence of the church was still future, but Jesus wanted His disciples to remember and apply His teaching about

conflict resolution during that future time when He *would* be building His church.

The Lord's Supper

- In Matthew 26:26-30 Jesus celebrated the Lord's Supper:
"While they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is My body. And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom. After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives." (Matthew 26:26-30)
- This passage does not record Jesus commanding the disciples to continue this practice in their future fellowship. However, Jesus did institute the Lord's Supper as a regular practice because the apostle Paul wrote that he directly received it as an on-going ordinance for the church (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

Water Baptism

- In Matthew 28:18-20 Jesus instituted the practice of baptism as an on-going ordinance:
"And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)
- Here Jesus commanded His disciples to carry on the practice of baptism as part of their on-going disciple making ministry in the future.

Why so little teaching, Lord?

- None of the ordinances Christ instituted would have any meaning without having a specific group in which to practice them. But the church did not yet exist at the time Jesus was teaching these things, and these few passages comprise the entire teaching of Christ about the subject of the church.
- Christ only gave hints and promises about the church. Why did Jesus not provide more extensive teaching about something as important as the church?
- There are other Bible passages that give us an answer to this question.

What had to happen before the church could come into existence?

The death and resurrection of Christ

- In Acts 20:28 the apostle Paul made this comment:
"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."
- Here the church is described as a group of people that became the property of the Lord Jesus Christ after He paid the price for them through His sacrificial death on the cross. The church could not be the church prior to the cross of Christ.
(See also 1 Peter 1:18-19; Revelation 5:9)

The ascension of Christ into heaven

- In Ephesians 4:7-8 we are told that at the time of His ascension Christ gave the spiritual gifts that are required for the operation of the church:
"But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN."
Immediately after this passage the apostle Paul described how these gifted men were to function within the church.
- Christ also clearly told His disciples that He was required to ascend into heaven before the Holy Spirit would come to "guide them into all truth" (John 16:13).
"But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you." (John 16:7)

The coming of the Holy Spirit

- A special ministry of the Holy Spirit was required in order for the church to exist.
- The apostle John recorded an incident where Jesus invited thirsty souls to come to Him and be refreshed from within:

"Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.' But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified." (John 7:37-39)

- This clearly tells us that the Holy Spirit had not yet begun His special ministry in the lives of believers. Also, this shows that the ascension of Jesus must take place before the church could come into existence. Only afterwards would the special ministry of the Spirit be given to believers.
- Later in John 15:26 Jesus is quoted as saying,
"When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of Truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me." (John 15:26)
The special ministry of the Holy Spirit could not begin until Christ inaugurated it from heaven.
- In Acts 1:5 it is clear that Jesus had not yet sent the Holy Spirit and that the church had not yet come into existence:
"To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, Which, He said, you heard of from Me; [in John 15 & 16] for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." (Acts 1:3-5)
- The church would not come into existence until after Christ's death, resurrection, ascension, and sending of the Holy Spirit. Acts 2 records this special coming of the Holy Spirit, which marked the beginning of the church in fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy and promises.

God instituted a new way of working with mankind

The Book of Acts records this transition

- Prior to the existence of the church, God focused His efforts on the nation of Israel. The key to pleasing God was to become part of His national people, and provision was made for those who were not born as Israelites to become auxiliary members of the nation.
- After the death, resurrection, and ascension of Israel's Messiah, and after the "giving of the Holy Spirit" in Acts 2, a new and different way of coming to God was instituted. This new thing called the "church" was something that God chose to keep secret until the time it came into existence. There was no clear teaching in the Old Testament about the church, and Jesus taught only in prophecy and hints about the church.

The "mystery" of God's new plan

- The New Testament describes God's new plan as a "mystery" -- which is defined as something that was not previously revealed, but was then being revealed through the apostles and prophets.
"Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested" (Romans 16:25-26)
- God in His own wisdom and planning, chose to keep secret the mystery of this new way of working with mankind through the church.

The "mystery" of the church

- Ephesians 3:1-7 is an example of a passage that explains the mystery of the church:
"For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles -- if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power." (Ephesians 3:1-7)
- Before the death, resurrection, and ascension of Israel's Messiah, all non-Jews who desired to please God would have to become proselytes of Judaism. But now God is taking people from among all nations and He is making them members of one body (the church), rather than requiring membership in the nation of Israel.

Christ's teaching was brief because of the "mystery" of the church

God's revelation is progressive and given in history

- The Bible is probably the only religious book that is tied to the historical time line of mankind. God revealed Himself and His plan little by little over the course of world history, and His overall plan in history sometimes called for differences in the way He related to and dealt with people.
- Jesus' teaching was limited because He taught during the time before the mystery of the church could be fully revealed. Therefore, it will be important to study the subsequent teaching given later in the New Testament -- the revelation of the mystery that was given to the apostles and prophets after the inauguration of the church.