

**And He put all things under His feet,
and gave Him to be head over all
things to the church, which is His
body, the fullness of Him who fills all
in all. (Ephesians 1:22)**

Established by Revelation

The word “church” appears only twice in the four gospels, both times used by Jesus in the gospel of Matthew. It is the English translation of the Greek word *ekklesia*, which means “a calling out.” In ancient Greek life it referred to “a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place; an assembly.”^[1] *Ekklesia* appears 118 times in the New Testament, where it is translated “church” 115 times and “assembly” 3 times. The word itself does not have holy connotations. There is, however, a unique *ekklesia* of Jesus Christ—a distinct group of people called out of this world to Him. From now on I will refer to this *ekklesia* as the “church,” but please keep in mind that the real meaning of the word “church” has been grossly distorted today. When I sense my teaching conflicts with this distortion, I will **often refer to** the church as the “true, real, genuine or invisible” church, to reinforce this critical understanding.

Caesarea Philippi is the location of giant rock formation wherein lies the entrance to a large cave that was believed to be the gates to Hades in ancient times. This was the symbolic backdrop from where Jesus first referred to His church:

When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?”

So they said, “Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”

Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for **flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.** “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and **on this rock I will build My church,** and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. “And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ. (Matthew 16:13–20)

The people were saying that Jesus was just another prophet, while God was revealing that He is indeed the Messiah. Here we have the beginning of the church, founded on the revelation of Jesus Christ. Its design and function comes exclusively from God and not man (“flesh and blood”).

Jesus symbolically changed Simon’s name to Peter after God revealed to Him who Jesus is. He subsequently declared, “on this rock I will build my church...” This is the same Rock of the Old Testament which was a symbolic reference to the Messiah.^[2] The Greek word

petros, translated here in English as “Peter,” is generally used for a smaller stone or rock, while *petra*, translated here in English as “rock,” is generally used for a large rock (boulder), foundation stone, or cliff (like the cliff-like formation overshadowing Caesarea Philippi).^[3] Jesus was not saying that He was going to build His church upon Peter. He was announcing that He was going to build His church on the revelation knowledge of Himself, the chief cornerstone (see Psalm 118:22 and Isaiah 28:16). Peter himself made this clear in his own teaching:

Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture,

“Behold, I lay in Zion
A chief cornerstone, elect, precious,
And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.” (1 Peter 2:4–6)

It was through this revelation that Peter became an apostle—a builder of men up into Christ. Simon in his humanity alone was not able to start or build the church, but Peter was through the revelation given to him. This subtle transition is important to grasp, because growth in the true church only comes through God’s revelation. It does not grow through man’s humanistic decisions, ideals, teachings, and ways.

Simon also began the process of partaking in the divine nature through this revelation. His name change to Peter, which holds similar meaning to that of the Rock, reflects this. He would later teach this process in detail in his second epistle (2 Peter 1). Jesus builds upon that which reflects His **name** (His character or person).

Jesus told Peter, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven ...” Keys are symbolic of the authority to open or shut (keep locked) the door to something.^[4] This is interesting, given that Jesus also said: “I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture” (John 10:9). Jesus was giving Peter the authority to open or shut the door to His gospel.

In his teaching series, *The Life of the Messiah from a Jewish Perspective*, Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum points out that it was Peter who had the role of opening the door for all three people groups (Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles). After the Holy Spirit was given on the day of Pentecost, it was his preaching that opened the door for the Jews (see Acts 2). Philip’s preaching of Christ to the Samaritans did not lead to the baptism of the Spirit for them, because he did not have the key. Afterward the apostles in Jerusalem sent Peter (and John) there to pray and lay hands on them (see Acts 8). Paul was commissioned as an apostle to the gentiles but he did not have the key. Peter opened the door for the gentiles when he preached the gospel to Cornelius and his family and friends and the Holy Spirit fell on them (see Acts 10).

Apostolic Structure

Jesus introduced the apostolic structure of the church here as Peter was to be the leader of the first 12 apostles. Yet, Jesus said to Peter, “I will build My church.” Apostles are servants chosen by God to spearhead what Christ Himself is doing. They are not in control. Consider what Jesus told His disciples elsewhere:

But you, do not be called ‘Rabbi’; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ.

(Matthew 23:8–10)

But Jesus called them to Himself and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet **it shall not be so among you**; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:25–28)

One cannot choose to be an apostle, neither can one go to some religious institution to become one. This is why the apostle Paul referred to himself as, “an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead)” and as “an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.”^[5] Note that Jesus chose Peter, a fisherman, to lead His church and not Nicodemus, an expert in Jewish law. Do not misunderstand me, an apostle can go to a Bible school or be a scholar (like the apostle Paul), however, *a Bible school cannot produce an apostle or any other church leader.*

Apostles are conduits—primarily through teaching—for the Head of the church, Jesus, to reveal Himself to man. The apostle Paul described this relationship in his first letter to the Corinthian church:

Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building.

According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 3:5–11)

The Creator of the heavens and the earth—the visible, physical realm—has also created the invisible realm (to man at least). Using agriculture and construction as analogies, Paul laid out aspects of the design of the invisible operation of Christ and His church. Such comparisons of God's relationship with His people Israel, using agricultural symbolism, are abundant in the Old Testament.^[6]

Divine Growth

Nature—having come forth from the same Designer—provides an excellent illustration for how the Lord grows His people up in the divine nature (to bear the fruit of the Spirit). The earth is like a garden created by God for the purpose of growing various plants. The plants come from seeds containing all the information needed to grow them. They were predesigned with this information. Also in the unseen (or microscopic) realm, there are scientific processes designed by God through which they grow from a seed and reproduce. In the physical realm, heat, light, water, and nutrients are required to grow the

plant to its fruit bearing capacity. Other outside physical elements, such as cold and wind, make the plants stronger.

Those who hear the gospel and believe in Jesus Christ receive the Holy Spirit and are baptized in His name (His person and character). When they first receive the Spirit it is as if a seed containing the information of the divine nature of God is planted in them. The ongoing teaching of the Spirit will establish the obedient believer in Christ. Apostles are like gardeners who tend to this growth process—the Spirit teaching through them. They bring nothing of value in the physical realm to this growth process (“neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters”), for it is only the Spirit within them that is valuable. The Designer is the one who actually grows and establishes the plants that resemble His character and bear His fruit.

Finally, there is Jesus’s description of this process:

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” (John 15:1–5)

This *true vine life* is the hallmark of my ministry.

Paul warned us to be careful how we build. The response of each individual to the Holy Spirit determines if and how they grow. Only that which is of Christ will have any eternal

value, as Jesus Himself taught:

"Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who **built his house on the rock**: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for **it was founded on the rock**.

"But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall."

(Matthew 7:24–27)

One needs to hear and do what Jesus says to be firmly established in the divine nature. It is on this Rock that Jesus builds His church.

The Body of Christ

The church is also Biblically referred to as "the body of Christ." This descriptor is not simply just a nice saying, as often portrayed by shallow teaching, but rather, it is helpful for understanding the reality of what God has purposed His real church to be. Consider what Paul wrote to the Colossian church:

He [Jesus Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have preeminence.

For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. (Colossians 1:15–20)

God designed all things to exist through Jesus Christ and all things are held together by Him.^[7] This is a powerful revelation which I have covered in detail [elsewhere](#) in the Essentials series. The apostle John wrote that Jesus Christ, “was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him” (John 1:10). Man was separated from his Designer by the corruption of sin and unknowing because of the deceitfulness of sin. Jesus *frequently* explained this through the symbolic dichotomy of light and darkness.

“And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” (John 3:19)

Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.” (John 8:12)

“I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness.” (John 12:46)

All things—both light and darkness—consist or are held together by Jesus Christ, but only the church is in Him, in the light. This brings us to the following connecting Scripture:

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of **Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light**; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. (1 Peter 2:9–10)

The true church—the called out *ekklesia*—have been brought out of darkness and placed in the light of life in Jesus Christ. As Jesus fills His church through the [, the church literally becomes the body of Christ shining in the darkness. Recall Jesus' declaration: "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden" \(Matthew 5:14\).](https://www.truevinelife.com/growthinchrist//the-empowerment-of-the-holy-spiritpart-1-preparation)

God gave Jesus "to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:22–23). Jesus fills the church as His leadership design, communicated by His Spirit, is followed. The Spirit gifts believers in many ways and we each have different functions. These come from the Lord and not the ambitions and ways of man. Mature believers are governed by the Lord and do not expect other believers to function the same way they do. Along these lines, Paul presented the church with the following guidance:

For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. (Romans 12:3–5)

There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. (1 Corinthians 12:4–6)

The key realization is that “it is the same God who works all in all.”

Conclusion

The church that Jesus started is not one that came from man, neither is it to be built by man. Jesus said, “I will build My church”. It is his. He designed it. He controls it. Only he can build it. It was designed to only be built on the rock—the revelation knowledge of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit indwells and teaches those who receive Jesus so that they may be like Him and live the life that He reveals to them. The true church is built as present day disciples live the lives He reveals to them. It is not a building or a religious group. It is simply the people who have received this revelation from God and, like Simon turned to Peter, have found a new life because of it. They have been called out of the world’s system to follow Christ. The called out believers in Christ are the template for God to reveal Himself in manifold ways to the world.

Endnotes

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1. Thayer's Greek Lexicon; see Acts 19:32–41 ↩
 2. Deuteronomy 32:4 and 2 Samuel 23:3 are examples of this ↩
 3. The “great stone” rolled in front of Jesus' tomb was a *petra*. ↩
 4. See Isaiah 22:22 and Revelation 1:18 ↩
 5. Galatians 1:1 and Colossians 1:1 ↩
 6. God declared concerning Israel, “Yet I had planted you a noble vine, a seed of highest quality” (Jeremiah 2:21a). Asaph, the psalmist, sang:

You have brought a vine out of Egypt;
You have cast out the nations, and planted it.
You prepared room for it,
And caused it to take deep root,
And it filled the land. ...

Return, we beseech You, O God of hosts;
Look down from heaven and see,
And visit this vine
And the vineyard which Your right hand has planted,
And the branch that You made strong for Yourself.
It is burned with fire, it is cut down;
They perish at the rebuke of Your countenance.
Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand,
Upon the son of man whom You made strong for Yourself. (Psalm 80:8–9, 14–17)

Isaiah prophesied concerning the ministry of the Messiah:
“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me,
Because the LORD has anointed Me
To preach good tidings to the poor; ...
That they may be called trees of righteousness,
The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.” (Isaiah 61:1a, 3b) ↩

7. Other quality Bible translations translate Colossians 1:17: “by him all things consist” (KJV); “in him all things hold together” (ESV); “in Him all things hold together” (NASB20). ↩