



Truth For These Times



38. CHURCH ORGANISATION

There are some who believe that religion is a personal thing, (to a large degree it is) and therefore do not see any need to associate or unite with any denomination. While it is true that belonging to a church and having one's name on the roll does not qualify a person to enter through the pearly gates into the city of God, the Bible clearly shows God's plan to unite His people in the "church". The Christian is not to be isolated from other Christians, nor from society. Rather, the Christian will find strength and joy in associating with those of like faith by attending the place of worship. The believer is therefore fitted to mix with society for the purpose of Christian witness but not be led in worldly paths. Association with non-Christians to witness is encouraged but not to partake in the sinful practices of the world. When Christ was on earth He organized the foundation of the Christian church.

CHRIST – THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH

Matthew 16:18 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.

At the first reading of this text it would appear that the church is built upon "Peter", but a closer examination shows us that the church was built upon "Christ". Other texts will show us that Christ is the Rock – not Peter. The name "Peter" means "a stone", (Petros in Greek) but Christ is symbolized by immovable "rock", (Petra in Greek). It was not until the 5th century that a bishop considered it necessary to find some Biblical support for papal supremacy. Indeed, during Peter's life he never considered himself as the foundation of the church. In fact, the apostle James was the chairman and administrator of the early church. See Acts 15:6, 13, 19. If we could have been there on that occasion when Christ spoke these words we could see Christ pointing to Peter and saying, "Thou art Peter": – then pointing back to Himself, Christ said "Upon this rock I will build my church." The gates of hell prevailed against Peter when he denied his Lord three times, but Christ was victorious in every point. Surely He is the only worthy foundation upon which the Christian church could be built. Interestingly in verse 23 Christ said to Peter "Get thee behind me Satan". Peter certainly wasn't Satan. Christ knew Satan had put the evil thought in Peter's mind. Peter wasn't Satan; neither was he the Rock.

1 Corinthians 3:11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Indeed, there is no foundation for the Christian church, other than Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 2:20 Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*.



Christ is the foundation of the Church.

Jesus is the supreme section of the foundation of the Christian church.

1 Corinthians 10:1-4 Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.

Here Christ is identified as the One who led the Israelites through the Red Sea and accompanied them in their wilderness wanderings. Once again he is referred to as the “Rock”. Peter was never called the rock.

ORGANISATION OF THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Acts 2:47 Praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.



Elders were appointed in every church.

The church is composed of those who respond to the call of Christ and find salvation. It was God’s plan to have His people in an organised band, which He called – “the church”.

Acts 14:23, 27 So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed... Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

Here we see a definite organisation in the early Christian church. Leaders were chosen and ordained as elders. A record of names and addresses was apparently kept so that they could “gather the church together” on this occasion. God is thoroughly organized as we look into His created works, and so was His church in the days of the apostles.

Acts 15:2 Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.

Not only was the church organized on a local level, but also it had its headquarters in Jerusalem. Here, major problems and decisions were discussed and solutions were found.

Matthew 18:15-17 Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that “by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.” And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

While it is not the responsibility of the church to condemn or judge a man, Christ nevertheless gave the church disciplinary responsibility. If one of the members is living in open sin or rebellion, the church has the authority to deal with the matter. However, in such cases, every effort is made to reason with

the one who is in error, and in love the church tries to win this person back to the path of righteousness. No hasty decisions are made. Only as a last resort would the church recommend that a person be no longer included on the church roll.

Ephesians 5:25-27 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.



The church has the responsibility of dealing with sin in the church.

Christ loves the church supremely. It is composed of His special treasure – those who have responded to His love and have accepted Him as their Saviour. A church building may be necessary, but the real church is composed of people – born again Christians. While we trust in Him and His righteousness, He can look upon His church as having no spot or wrinkle.

Matthew 13: 24, 25, 28-30 Another parable He put forth to them, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The servants said to him, ‘Do you want us then to go and gather them up?’ But he said, ‘No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.’”

In Matthew 13:37-43 Jesus explains this parable. He said that the good seed was sown by the Son of man and the field is the world. The good seed are Christians and the tares belong to the devil. The harvest is the judgment at the end of the world. Both good and bad live in this same world, but we should not even be surprised to see both good and bad in the church. Some are offended when they see professed Christians acting or speaking in a manner not in accord with Christian standards. Don’t be dismayed for it is the devil’s plan to use such people to turn you away from the church and thus cause you to be lost. We must always look to Jesus for our example – not people. However it is not our prerogative to condemn people and set ourselves up as judges – that would be wrong. But we quietly observe, and resolve to live the life God wants us to live. We are responsible to God for our own lives. If we could tactfully help another person who is harassed by temptation, that is a different matter.



Jesus told parables concerning the church.

THE CHURCH IN THE LAST DAYS

Revelation 12:17 And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Using a woman as a symbol Revelation 12 depicts the church's history through the ages. Verse 17 speaks of the "remnant" or the church on earth during the last days of earth's history. Satan is especially angry at the remnant who keep God's commandments and have the testimony of Jesus.

Hebrews 10:25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.



Church depicted as a woman in Revelation 12.

As we approach the end of time it becomes more important to assemble together. We need the strength gained by fellowship to live victorious Christian lives. It is God's desire that we attend the place of worship. It is true that we can worship God amongst nature, in our own homes; or anywhere for that matter; but this admonition from God's Word remains that we should not absent ourselves from the meetings of the church.

Ephesians 4:11, 13 And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

The gifts of prophets, pastors, teachers etc., are to remain in the church until we all come in the unity of the faith or until the kingdom of God is established. Therefore we expect to see organization in God's remnant church today.

Matthew 24:14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.



Church called to preach the gospel to the whole world.

The church needs to be organised to fulfil its task of preaching the gospel message to the world. When this is completed, the end shall come. The fulfilment of the gospel commission requires the organised participation of every church member.

The Seventh-day Adventist church is well organised and has reached almost every country of the world with the good news of salvation. The structure of organization briefly is as follows.

The world headquarters, situated in Washington DC is called the General Conference. There is a president, a number of administrators and office workers. Each administrator usually cares for one phase of church work, such as: Caring for ministerial work; Personal Ministries, for training of laymen in community work; Education; Youth Evangelism; Health and Medical, etc.

The world is divided into Divisions, which have a similar organisation to the General Conference. We live in the South Pacific Division, which consists of Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific Islands.

Then the Division is divided into Unions, which again has the administrative workers caring in particular for their own area.

Australia consists of one Union. The Union Conferences are finally broken down to local conferences, usually one situated in each state.

The local church is the vital part of the organization.

- **GENERAL CONFERENCE**
- **DIVISIONS**
- **UNIONS**
- **LOCAL CONFERENCES**
- **LOCAL CHURCHES**

Under such an organization the church functions very efficiently and is able to perform its vital task.

Revelation 18:2, 4 And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!” And I heard another voice from heaven saying, “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.”



God is calling people out of false systems of worship to unite with God’s remnant church

The Lord is calling His people to come out of the false systems of worship and unite with God’s remnant church.

John 10:16, 27 And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock *and* one shepherd. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.

Jesus is speaking of Gentiles who would respond to the news of salvation. The same pattern will be repeated just before Jesus comes again. God’s true people are to be found in all the churches, but as yet they have not all been called into the true fold. But when God reveals light from His Word that they have not understood previously, they will respond to His voice and unite with His remnant church who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus. Perhaps God is speaking to your heart today. Remember the words of Jesus “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me”.

Review Sheet – Church Organisation

ASSIGNMENT: Read the Bible study carefully before answering the following questions.

1. Upon what did Christ say He would build His church? Matthew 16:18
And on _____
2. Explain why Peter is not the Rock.
Answer: _____
3. Who is the foundation of the Christian church?
1 Corinthians 3:11. Ephesians 2:20. Answer: _____
4. Who is the Rock? 1 Corinthians 10:4.
Answer: _____
5. Give evidence that the early Christian church was well organized.
Acts 2:47; 14:23, 27; 15:2.
Answer: _____

6. Explain the authority given to Christ's church. Matthew 18:15-17.
Answer: _____
7. To what extent did Christ love the church? Ephesians 5:25-27.
Just as _____,
8. Some in the church may not be genuine. When will the final separation of good and evil take place? Matthew 13:28-30.
Wheat with them. Let _____ (judgment)
9. How is God's true church of the last days recognized? Revelation 12:17.
Who _____
10. Should a genuine Christian attend church? Hebrews 10:25.
Not _____
11. What is one of the main works of the church? Matthew 24:14.
And this _____
12. What is God's final call to His people who are involved in other churches? Revelation 18:4.
Saying _____

Is it your determination to be a part of God's remnant church? YES _____ NO _____