

Except the Lord Build the House

“Except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it” (Psalm 127:1)

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The Psalmist David declared: “Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it” (Psalm 27:1). The psalm might well be called the “Builder’s Psalm”. The Hebrew writer said: “For every house is built by some man; but he that built all things is God” (Hebrews 3:4). The verse may refer to all sorts of house building, but we want to use the word “house” in two senses in this lecture: (1) the house as one’s home, or marriage; and (2) as the Lord’s church, a congregation of people worshipping God. In our labors, we need to remember if the Lord is not with us in His approval our labors will prove failures.

In the long ago, when some began to build the tower of Babel to reach “unto heaven,” the Lord stopped it and “scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off the build the city” (Genesis 11:8). When Solomon planned to build the beautiful temple for the Lord, with some of the material that his father David had saved for this purpose, he was blessed of God in so doing. Even the people who were not Israelites helped him in this great work. But Solomon could not have built the temple without the help of the Lord. Some think that this psalm was written for Solomon. It is possible that David wrote these words for his own wise son. It is a beautiful psalm.

In the past great houses have been erected by ambitious men, but time has erased their labors on many of these material buildings. There is scarce a stone that remains where they once stood. Today, unless we build according to God’s designs, we labor in vain. We are here taught that builders of houses (homes) and churches (congregations) all labor in vain unless they have the Lord’s approval.

Build Our Homes

Stones, bricks and timber may well build a building (house) in which to live as a family, but unless the good hand of God be upon us, we cannot build a home pleasing to God. All marriages that are not under the blessings of God, will, sooner or later, prove to be a public curse. The Lord must build the house. He Himself is the builder of the home.

I have lived now for a long time, (93 years), and the longer I live the more convinced I am that God’s ways of living are right. What is a lawful marriage? It is one man to one woman, for life. In the beginning God created man “in his own image”; “male and female created he them” (Genesis 2:28). So God created Eve, a woman, to be his suitable, or fit, companion (v.22). Then God gave the law of marriage, saying: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (v.24). God established the home, and marriage is much more than a “civil contract” recognized by earthly courts. It is a permanent union established by the authority of God before man. God united the first man and the first woman in holy wedlock. Jesus stated in His ministry: “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder: (Matthew 19:6). Polygamy is wrong; homosexuality is wrong. God through Moses

said: "Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination" (Leviticus 18:22); "If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death" (Leviticus 20:13). Same-sex "marriages" are wrong.

Physical death breaks the marriage bond and sets the survivor free to remarry. "The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord" (I Corinthians 7:39). However, also, if a marriage partner commits fornication, the innocent partner has the right to obtain a divorce and remarry. But this is the only reason given. Jesus stated: "Whomsoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery" (Matthew 19:9); "But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery" (Matthew 5:32; cf. Romans 7:2-3). So the Bible teaches abstinence until marriage and fidelity to one's companion after marriage.

Pre-marital and extra-marital sex is wrong. God's law reads, "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14; Romans 13:9). Paul stated to Christians: "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye abstain from fornication:" (I Thessalonians 4:3). He also wrote that "adultery" is a work of the flesh that will keep one who practices such out of heaven, unless he truly repents and is forgiven (cf. I Corinthians 6:9-11; Galatians 5:19-21; Revelation 21:8; 22:15).

The Lord's marriage law is universal; it applies to all people everywhere. The innocent party may put away the guilty party on the grounds of fornication and may remarry, but the guilty party does not have that right. A divorce on grounds other than fornication, does not allow either party to remarry. If they both should remarry, that would also begin a state of adultery for all four parties. God does not approve of that kind of home (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:10-11), and we cannot change God's law. The words of the Lord are final; they will judge us in the last day (John 12:48). Building good homes is one of the greatest works in which people can engage. As the home goes, so goes the nation. However, within recent years, divorces and remarriages have been socially acceptable. Our nation has now over one million divorces per year. The increase in divorces has been greatly alarming in the past fifty years. Many are living together not married, and abortions are on the increase. Eighty-five percent of teenage marriages now end in divorce. There is a moral crisis in the land. In the minds of some people, there is nothing sacred about marriage and the home. But, usually, when a marriage is broken, a soul is lost. This makes it sad, indeed!

A sweet type of heaven is a good Christian home. It is the home that awaits us beyond the grave, a place of eternal bliss (John 14:2-3). "O, think of the home over there." No sorrows, no tears, no death (Revelation 21:4-5). Through the rich grace of God and by our obedience to His will, we all will reach that heavenly home (Revelation 22:14).

For Home Sweet Home Will Always Be The Dearest Shrine of Memory

Truly, "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it." How great it is to be a part of a good Christian home, one built upon the teachings of the Lord in His Word, where love abounds in each heart for one another and love dwells in the hearts of every one for the God of

heaven; and then to look forward to all members dwelling together in that eternal home of the soul after this earthly life is over. These are homes that bless the world today.

Building New Testament Congregations

The Lord promised to build His church upon the great truth that Peter confessed, that He (Christ) was the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:18). Christ is the head of the church (Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:23), the body of Christ. "There is one body" (Ephesians 4:4). However, the New Testament teaches that members of the church, added to it by the Lord (Acts 2:47), met in various groups in different places, such as Corinth, Ephesus, the seven churches of Asia, etc., and were called "the churches of Christ" (Romans 16:16). These congregations were established by the preaching (teaching) of the inspired word of God, the gospel, and by people obeying the Lord in baptism (Acts 2:36-47; 8:26-39).

Today our purpose should be to build churches exactly like the church the Lord built in the beginning and as it is revealed in the Word of God. By following this divine pattern (2 Timothy 1:13 ASV, NKJV), we can do it. In so doing, the Lord builds the church. As an illustration of this idea, take as an example, the Lord's statement to Moses in the long ago of building the tabernacle in the wilderness as a place of worship. "According to all that I show thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments, thereof, even so shall ye make it" (Exodus 25:9). Note too, the comment made of in Hebrews 8:5: "...as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount." Moses had to follow the divine pattern. In like manner, the apostles received, by the divine guidance of the Holy Spirit (John 16:13; Luke 24:49), the plans and specifications for the church of Christ, and in their inspired writings all of these things have been recorded.

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine [teaching, ASV], for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Therefore, Timothy was solemnly urged to always "PREACH THE WORD" (2 Timothy 4:2). The early disciples "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42).

Thus, when we follow the teaching that has been recorded for us in the New Testament, we are building New Testament congregations, or true churches of Christ. This is what the God of heaven intends for us to do. Wherever you find a body of people teaching and practicing these things, there you find a true church after the New Testament pattern. For, what made a Christian in the days of the apostles will make a Christian now; and what made a church of Christ then will make a church of Christ now.

Our plea is to follow New Testament teaching and be exactly as were the early Christians. We do not belong to any human, man-made denomination. We are Christians only and belong to the church of Christ which He purchased with His own precious blood (Acts 20:28). Denominationalism is a mixture of Christianity, Judaism, paganism, etc., in its various forms. Pure, unadulterated Christianity, however, is found in the New Testament, revealed in the teaching of Christ and His apostles. Our plea, therefore, is to go back to the Bible and "speak as the oracles

of God” (1 Peter 4:11), and call Bible things by Bible names and do Bible things in Bible ways. In so doing, we believe we are following a course that is infallibly right and safe. We believe that the world today needs plain, simple positive gospel preaching, and this we are endeavoring to do in every right way that is possible.

Principles That Are Right

If we are going to promote true Christianity and practice those things which are Scriptural and right, there are certain principles that must always be taught. In no other way can we build, or reproduce, the true church of our Lord Jesus Christ. We must follow the divine pattern, and some of these important items we now mention.

1. To be the true church, we must follow the Lord’s plan of salvation. One must hear the gospel and believe in Christ as the Son of God, repent of all sins, confess the name of Christ and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:36-38; 17:30-31; Romans 10:17; Matthew 10:32-33; Romans 10:9-10; 1 Timothy 6:12-13).
2. We must teach that baptism is a burial and a resurrection in water of a penitent believer and baptism is unto remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 8:12, 26-29; Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12; Mark 16:16).
3. We must wear the name of Christ as individuals and as a group of saved people worshiping God: individuals are called “Christians” (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16), and sometimes “disciples” (Acts 11:26), “saints” (Romans 1:7) and “brethren” (James 1:2; 2 Peter 1:10). But to wear a human name is condemned in the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 1:10-15; 3:3-5). Local congregations of the saints are called “churches of Christ” (Romans 16:16) and sometimes just “the church” (Revelation 2:1). Denominational names are not found in the Scriptures.
4. Christians are called out of the world by the gospel and they are to assemble and worship the true and living God according to the teaching of the Word of God. They meet upon the first day of the week to eat (observe) the Lord’s Supper, to sing praises to God, to pray, to give of their means, and to study/teach/preach the Word of the Lord (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2). Worship must be (a) unto God, (b) in spirit, [reverence (Hebrews 12:28)], and (c) in truth (John 17:17). Jesus said to the woman of Samaria: “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). Paul said to the Colossians: “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord” (3:17).
5. Singing is a part of our worship. “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:19). “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord: (Colossians 3:16). “By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name: (Hebrews 13:15). Mechanical instruments of music are not authorized in New Testament worship. To use them would be going beyond the Word of God and adding to it (2 John 9; Revelation 22:18). In the Old Testament days when two men,

Nadab and Abihu, offered to God that which He had not commanded, God destroyed them by fire (Leviticus 10:1-2; cf. Romans 15:4; Hebrews 2:1-4).

6. The first day of the week, the resurrection day of Christ, is also called “the Lord’s day” in the Scriptures (Revelation 1:10). The early Christians “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). The Lord’s Supper is to be observed every Lord’s Day. They were urged not to forsake the assembling of themselves together (Hebrews 10:25). Worship is very important.
7. The organization of each local congregation is very simple. When men were spiritually qualified, they were selected and appointed as elders, bishops, overseers, pastors, shepherds and presbyters. These names apply to the same men as the overseers of the welfare of the church. After Paul and Barnabas had been on their first missionary journey as far as Lystra and Derbe, they turned around and started back to Antioch, their home base. But it is recorded: “And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed (Acts 14:23). There were “elders” (plural) in each “church” (singular), not one elder over several churches. Each congregation was a local, independent unit (church).
8. When Paul was on his journey to Jerusalem, from Miletus, he called for “the elders of the church” at Ephesus to come and meet him. When they came, he said to them: “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers (the ASV uses the word “bishops”), to feed the church of God” (Acts 20:28).
9. In writing to the young evangelist Titus, Paul said he had left him in Crete, “that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city (Titus 1:5). Then he gave the qualifications of an elder (vs.6-9), but here he used the term “bishop”.
10. Peter, in his first general epistle, wrote: “The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed; feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away” (1 Peter 5:1-4).
11. Paul also wrote to the young evangelist, Timothy, and gave to him the qualifications of an elder in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, but here he used the word “bishop”. Also Paul mentioned the “deacons” of the church. They were the special helpers in material matters to the members of the church. Their qualifications are given in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. In the Jerusalem church seven men were selected by the church to “wait on tables” in the daily ministrations (Acts 6:1-6), the giving of food.
12. The church, when following the New Testament pattern, will have evangelists, preachers, whose main duty is to faithfully “preach the word”, and to visit and teach “from house to house” (2 Timothy 4; Acts 20:20, 26-27, 31). Preachers were not called “the Pastor of the church”. Jesus said, “Teach all nations...Preach the gospel to every creature” (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark

16:15). There is a great need today to proclaim the gospel truth to the utmost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8), and much good work is being done. To God be the glory! Not only should sinners be taught how to obey the gospel and urged to do so, but members of the church need to be taught how to grow spiritually. Christians can fall from grace and be eternally lost but Christians need to be taught how to grow spiritually by adding to their lives the Christian graces (2 Peter 1:3-11; cf. 3:18; 1 Peter 2:2; Revelation 2:10), and to hold on to the Lord to the end of life's journey.

13. The true church will teach that the Bible is the perfect and complete Word of God and fully sufficient to furnish us unto all good works (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The Holy Spirit guided the apostles into all truth, and we must "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). There are no additional truths being given by the Holy Spirit to any one today, and none has been given since the apostle John closed the Book of Revelation in about A.D. 96. When all the truth was given, miraculous gifts of the Spirit ceased (1 Corinthians 13:8-13). No one can perform miracles today. They have ceased. Once divine power caused some to speak in tongues they did not know, heal the sick instantly, raise the dead and do other miracles, but no one has that power today (cf. Mark 16:17-20). The complete Word of God has been given and confirmed and recorded. Let no one be deceived by "false prophets" (cf. Matthew 7:15, 21-27; Revelation 22:14).

Conclusion

Other characteristics of the Lord's church could be given, but these should be sufficient for one to find and identify the true New Testament church today in any community or nation. Whenever you find a religious body of people practicing these things we have outlined, you will find a church after the New Testament order or pattern.

"Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it" (Psalm 127:1). You can be just a Christian without joining any denomination. You can be a non-denominational Christian by just simply following the teaching of Christ as revealed in the New Testament, and nothing else. We ask you to obey the Lord today.