

## The Church and The Truth

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Jesus Christ built the church (**Matthew 16:18**). He built it, and He bought it (**Acts 20:28**). The church belongs to Him (**Matthew 16:18**). Jesus is the church's head (**Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:18**), and it is His body (**Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:24**). Jesus has only one body (**Ephesians 4:4; Romans 12:4-5**); consequently, He has only one church. Jesus will save His church (**Ephesians 5:23**), and souls enter into it when they are baptized (**1 Corinthians 12:13**).

### THE PILLAR & SUPPORT OF THE TRUTH

The church that Jesus built is “*the pillar and support of the truth*” (**1 Timothy 3:15**). This means it *upholds* the truth—the truth found in the word of God (**John 17:17**). The church does not do this by ignoring the truth, or by misinterpreting it. Rather, the church upholds the truth by accurately interpreting it, teaching it, and practicing it. In this way, the church ensures that the truth is *held up* for all—sinner and saved, alike—to behold and believe.

### THE APOSTLES' DOCTRINE

The early church “*continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine (i.e. teaching)*” (**Acts 2:42**). This was a reflection of its truth-supporting identity. Jesus had said to Peter, “[*W*]hatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (**Matthew 16:19**). And to all the apostles, He had uttered the same declaration: “*Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven*” (**Matthew 18:18**). What the apostles taught—what they bound (prohibited) and loosed (permitted)—was authorized by heaven.

The apostles' commands are not inferior to Jesus' commands. Rather, they *are* Jesus' commands. Jesus promised the apostles that the Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth—truth which the Spirit would acquire from Him: “*He will glorify Me,*” Jesus said, “*for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you*” (**John 16:14**). This was so important that Jesus repeated it: “*All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you*” (**John 16:15**). This is why the apostle Paul could write: “*If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that **the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord***” (**1 Corinthians 14:37**).<sup>1</sup> The Lord Jesus Christ spoke in Paul (**2 Corinthians 13:3**), as He did in all the apostles. The apostles' words were *Jesus'* words.

To receive Jesus and operate under His headship, then, a church must receive the apostles' teachings. Jesus, Himself, said to the apostles, “*He who receives you receives Me...*” (**Matthew 10:40**). On this basis, John wrote concerning himself and the other apostles: “*We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error*” (**1 John 4:6**).<sup>2</sup> The church that Jesus built, bought, and will save upholds the truth by receiving not only the words Jesus spoke verbally, but those He spoke vicariously through His apostles. By so doing, the church receives Jesus and is governed by Him. Any church that does otherwise does not have Jesus as its head, is “*not of God,*” and is guided by “*the spirit of error.*” We cannot have God without Jesus, and we cannot have Jesus without the apostles.

### A LOSS OF IDENTITY

The church that Jesus will save is “*built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone*” (**Ephesians 2:20**). It both upholds, and is *upheld by*, the truth. Truth is integral to its identity. It was established on it and established to support it. Does the church support the truth flawlessly? No. At all times, some within the church are immature (**1 John 2:13**), some are weak (**Romans 14:1**), and all sin (**1 John 1:8**). Imperfection in the church is the way of things (**Ephesians 4:15-16**), and does not keep a church from being *the church*...up to a point.

The Lord has His limits.

The church at Ephesus serves as an example.<sup>3</sup> It had left its “*first love*” (**Revelation 2:4**). Though hardworking and doctrinally sound (**Revelation 2:2-3, 6**), the congregation had failed to maintain its

original love for the Lord and/or one another. This failure to *practice the truth* endangered the congregation's standing with Jesus. "[R]epent and do the first works," Jesus told them, "or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place..." (**Revelation 2:5**). "Its place" was in Jesus' presence (**Revelation 1:13**). Its removal meant He would no longer walk among them (**Revelation 2:1**). Ephesus was in danger of becoming a church in name only—a "church" recognized by its members, and the community, perhaps, but not by the Lord. The church that belongs to Jesus upholds the truth (**1 Timothy 3:15**). Churches that do otherwise belong to someone else. Jesus does not have a body that does not obey its Head (**Matthew 7:21-23; Luke 13:24-27**).

## A CALL TO CONSIDER

Does your church uphold the truth? Is it "*holding fast to the Head*" (**Colossians 2:19**)?

Sadly, most churches, today, aren't. They teach *some* truth—in some cases, *a lot* of truth—but they fall short of "*continu[ing] steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine*." On multiple points, they have fallen prey to "*teaching as doctrines the commandments of men*" (**Matthew 15:9**). Concerning the church. Concerning worship. Concerning marriage. Concerning salvation!

"What must I do to be saved?" the sincere seeker asks. "Pray this prayer," says one church. "Only believe," says another. "Speak in tongues," says yet another. But Jesus and the apostles never gave these answers. They taught that one must *believe* (**John 3:36; Romans 10:9**), *repent* (**Matthew 4:17; Acts 3:19**), *confess* (**Luke 12:8; Romans 10:9-10**), and *be baptized* (**Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38**). And concerning baptism, specifically, the apostles taught that it came *before* salvation, not after. It was necessary for the forgiveness of sins (**Acts 2:38; 22:16**), for entrance into Christ (**Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27**), for reception of the Holy Spirit (**Acts 2:38**), and consequently, for salvation (**1 Peter 3:21**). This explains why new converts rejoiced only *after* they had been baptized (**Acts 8:39; 16:33-34**). They knew they weren't saved until Jesus had sanctified and cleansed them "*with the washing of water by the word*" (**Ephesians 5:26**). They weren't "born again" until they had been "*born of water and the Spirit*" (**John 3:3, 5**; cf. **Titus 3:5**). Baptism was when they entered into the body Jesus will save (**1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 5:23**).

But these truths (along with many others) are denied by many churches, today. They call Jesus, "Lord," but do not do the things He says (**Luke 6:46**). The apostles' doctrine is not *their* doctrine. And failing to uphold the truth, they are unable to help others find it: "*Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch?*" (**Luke 6:39**).

But the true church of God, the church that Jesus built, bought, and will save, continues to uphold the truth. And its members—some of whom work to make *The Gospel Message* possible—would like to help you find it. If you are seeking, may we be your servants for Jesus' sake? Please let us know. (I can be reached at [BibleAnswers@zoho.com](mailto:BibleAnswers@zoho.com))

## ENDNOTES

1. See also **1 Corinthians 11:23; Galatians 1:11-12**
2. Throughout **1 John**, John uses the pronoun "we." **1 John 1:1** reveals that the "we" is the apostles. John and the other apostles had "*heard*" Jesus (the "*Word of life*" who was "*from the beginning*" (**John 1:1-4**), "*seen*" and "*looked upon*" Him with their own eyes, and "*handled*" Him (**Luke 24:39; John 20:27**).
3. See also the example of the church at Laodicea (**Revelation 3:16**).