

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

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The Church and The Truth

John Morris

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**).¹ 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**).² 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*

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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.³ 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

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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 "*continuing 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)

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**).

~ 420 NW 1251st Rd., Holden, MO 64040
BibleAnswers@zoho.com

The Gazelle of Joppa

Richard Garbi

In the ninth chapter of the book of Acts we have a record of Peter journeying among the church in Judea. (**Acts 9:32**) While he is strengthening the brethren at Lydda he receives word that a dear sister in Joppa has died. This beloved sister appears in scripture for a mere seven verses (**Acts 9:36-43**), and yet her Christ-like life shines forth. In these seven verses, we cannot learn much detail about Tabitha¹, but what we have tells us much about her Christianity. She was so beloved by the brethren that after caring for her body they sent two men to Peter, who was in Lydda, so that Peter might come quickly and bring her back to life.

In verse thirty-six we are told, "*She was full of good works and acts of charity.*" When Peter arrives, he is greeted with evidence of her good deeds. "*All the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them*" (**Acts 9:39**, ESV). Her life had a profound impact on everyone around her so much so that it enabled the miracle of the Lord, in raising her from the dead, to have an even greater impact on the community. "*And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord*" (**Acts 9:42**). Just like Tabitha, the way we live our lives, and the way we treat our brethren, is the loudest proclamation of the Gospel we can make.

Jesus says in **Matthew 5:14-16**

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good

works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Jesus makes it clear that his followers will be visible in the world. Jesus tells us that if we are true followers we will stand out, like *“a city that is set on a hill.”* I don’t think Jesus is calling us to make extravagant gestures or professions of faith to draw attention to ourselves, but rather, if we live our lives for Him we will stand out and his light will shine forth through us. Living a life for Jesus means we will not be able to blend in with the world. We will be different. There is an additional point which Jesus makes here that we should examine: What if we do not shine forth? What if we try to blend in? Jesus tells us we are worthless, like salt without savor and a candle hidden under a basket.

Peter in **1 Peter 2:9-12** makes a similar point. He describes us as *“sojourners and exiles”* (**verse 11**) in the world. He evokes the idea of being a stranger in a strange land. How can you tell that some people come from a different place in the world? Isn’t it apparent in the way that they speak, the clothes they may wear, the food that they eat or prefer, or even the lost and lonely look in their eyes as they try to adjust to a new place? Peter is telling us that in this same way we are to be set apart from the world. People should look at us and think, *“You aren’t from around here are you?”* And we are not, for our kingdom is not from this world! We are to be strangers so that we can *“proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light”* (**verse 9**). In a world that largely reviles the gospel and blasphemes the name of Jesus, we can, like Tabitha, through our good works, *“which they shall behold”* (**verse 12**) still proclaim the Lord. Paul echoes this sentiment in **Philippians 2:14-16**, saying that if we walk uprightly as children of God while holding fast to the word that we will *“shine as lights”* in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. Paul writes in the book of **Ephesians 5:6-16** that we should *“walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true).”* Our lives should be a beacon for those looking for the Lord.

Personal evangelism may be the strongest avenue by which we can influence our friends and neighbors to come to the Lord. In a world filled with darkness, that has been conditioned to ridicule the Lord, people still respond to love. Tabitha gave herself in service and love, and the result was that many came to the Lord. She left a lasting impression on all of those around her and we must do the same. We must be like Tabitha and express our love for the Lord and our neighbors in all that we do. When we do this, we will shine forth as a city that is set on a hill and those around us will *“glorify your Father which is in heaven.”*

Endnotes

1. Strong’s, G5000 Tabitha = “female gazelle”

~ 1105 SW 14th Street Terrace, Blue Springs, MO 64015-4929
richard.garbi@gmail.com

Like Sheep Without a Shepherd

Charles Fry

The book of **Exodus** begins with a reminder of how the descendants of Israel came to be residents of Egypt for a long time. They grew into a significant ethnic minority there, a large distinct group not integrated into Egyptian society, with their own language and customs, who were readily seen as both inferior and threatening. It became easy for Egyptians to rationalize forcing the people of Israel into slavery and hard labor to wear them out and control them. When their population continued to grow rapidly even as enslaved and oppressed people, the notion of managing and even reducing their population by killing newborn boys seemed palatable, a prudent course to ensure the continued peace and prosperity of Egypt with her elevated culture. The first chapter of **Exodus** highlights the pragmatic cruelty of Egypt’s pharaoh and citizens toward the people of Israel based on fear of something they thought might happen someday and greed for the power and profit found in the exploitation of people who were in some ways different from themselves.

A baby boy was born in those days to an Israelite couple and illegally hidden and sheltered by his family, contrary to the pharaoh’s edict (**Exodus 2**). When he was three months old, the infant was placed in a carefully prepared ark, a kind of basket sealed against water, and set into the papyrus reeds near the bank of the Nile River. Soon he was discovered by an Egyptian princess and her servants, and arrangements were made for him to be nursed by an Israelite woman, in fact his own mother, until he was old enough to live with his adoptive Egyptian mother in her royal household. He was given the name Moses by the woman who saved his life and took him in. Thus Moses, born a condemned slave, spent much of his childhood and a portion of his adult life apart from his brutally oppressed kinfolk, enjoying the status and privileges of Egyptian royalty. However, knowing his own origin, Moses as an adult was not content with the pleasures and circumstances of the pharaoh’s household, and wanted to know what life was really like for his kinsmen, the enslaved people of Israel. Consequently, Moses began to go out among the slaves to see their lives first hand.

When Moses was investigating the way Israelites lived and suffered, he happened on a scene where an Egyptian was beating an Israelite (**Exodus 2:11**). Moses’s reaction to the injustice he saw was swift but purposeful. He looked around to see if anyone was watching, and then killed the Egyptian and buried his body in the sand. No doubt he reasoned that he was doing a good thing, rescuing a victim and administering a bit of well-deserved vigilante justice. Of course it turned out badly, and there really was no reasonable way it would not turn out badly. If Moses had not been exposed as the killer, someone else would have been blamed, perhaps the very man

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Moses had thought he would rescue. Trouble was bound to follow his rash decision to take matters into his own hands and kill the Egyptian and hide the deed, even if the Egyptian was wrong to beat the Israelite.

The next day Moses abruptly learned that his violent deed was no secret at all. Even if there were no other eye witnesses, the "rescued" slave must have known what happened and shared the secret with others. Consequently, when Moses was out again the next day he saw two men of Israel fighting (**Exodus 2:13**). Moses perceived that one of the two was wronging the other, and he was perplexed. Two Israelite men, both slaves, yet one abusing the other. Moses asked the antagonist why he did such a thing to his companion, a fellow sufferer under Egyptian bondage? He didn't really get the answer he was looking for, but it seems evident he was surprised an Israelite slave was behaving the same way an Egyptian master had behaved the day before. Moses probably had nurtured a naive idea of "good" Israelites and "bad" Egyptians, white hats and black hats, and was dismayed to see that the oppressed Israelites were also capable of meanness and oppression.

The Israelite bully replied to Moses first by asking "*who made you a prince and a judge over us?*" In fact, no one specifically had. Moses by virtue of his status in the royal household might have had some legitimate claim to such authority, but he was in a thoroughly awkward and comprised position, caught between two worlds. He wasn't in any sense representing Egyptian authority and at the same time he wasn't experiencing the life of the enslaved Israelites who were his family. For the reader the confrontation makes perfect sense, and yet there is a momentary shock as well, if we realize that several chapters earlier the same issue was raised for a different man who was also caught between two worlds, Lot in Sodom (**Genesis 19:9**). On that night Lot, a longtime resident of the condemned city who "sat in the gate," tried to persuade the men of Sodom not to abuse his guests, and they accused him of being a foreigner who wanted to make himself judge over them.

Lest we make the sort of mistake Moses himself made in Egypt, the messages in **Exodus 2** includes that oppressed people shouldn't be oppressed, they deserve deliverance and justice, but at the same time oppressed people are not inherently innocent or better than the people oppressing them.

In the words of the Israelite antagonist oppressing his fellow slave, we hear an echo of Sodom. Victims and victimizers both alike are sinners and need the mercy and grace of God and divine instruction to order their lives. We've all been "*straying like sheep*" and all need to turn to "*the Shepherd and Overseer*" of our souls (**1 Peter 2:25**).

~ 2312 Delbert Street, Bakersfield, CA 93312-2114
cfry@bak.rr.com

Glory to God!

The **Rock Creek Church of Christ, Ottawa, KS**, joined the angels in praise when **Daphne Eggleston** was buried with Christ on January 17. Their rejoicing continued on January 20 when Aria Stadler was raised together with Christ in baptism.

The Gospel Message

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Unionville, MO 63565
wadestanley@gmail.com

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