

# WHICH IS THE CHURCH?

## JESUS CHRIST ESTABLISHED BUT ONE VISIBLE CHURCH!

It is evident from the New Testament Scriptures that Jesus Christ established a church; that it originated at Jerusalem, and that it spread from thence into all parts of the world. From the same source it is evident that Christ established but *one* church; that it was not an invisible, but a visible church, having a visible membership, visible ministry, visible sacrament, visible ordinances, visible worship, and visible laws. That in that age it was everywhere known as a visible, organized body, and that it was to exist for a time, and eventually drift into an entire apostasy; and that it was to remain in that condition until the last days, when it was to be restored to its apostolic strength and beauty, preparatory to the second coming of Jesus Christ.

### QUERIES ARISING FROM THE PRESENT STATE OF CHRISTENDOM.

In these United States there are upwards of fifty visible, organized bodies, all calling themselves churches, and all claiming to be scriptural, and apostolic. Such being the case, a comparison of the present state of christendom with what was its equivalent, the religious world in the apostolic age, presents to a candid and inquiring mind serious differences. Since Christ established but one church, can it be right that there should be now upwards of fifty churches? And if the church has ceased, when did its existence terminate? And where did the churches obtain their authority to organize?

### IMPORTANCE OF THE SUBJECT.

Such are some of the queries that arise in every inquiring mind, on comparing the present state of christendom with what the church was in the apostolic age. Nor can any subject be of more vital interest, since the church Christ established, with its apostles, prophets, and teachers, its ordinances of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins (a); and the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost (b). And these gifts of the Holy Spirit that have always manifested themselves to the true believer in Christ (c). "And these signs shall follow them that believe."

These are some of the characteristics of the church, the only divinely appointed means of salvation. What can be of greater importance to us than to know whether we do belong to the true body of Jesus Christ, or have yielded allegiance to a foreign body? Surely in everything pertaining to our salvation we need the greatest certainty—certainty, not only in regard to the doctrines to be believed, but also in regard to the church. And as but one church was established upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, and that at a time when if any different order of churches had been needed, God would most assuredly have made provisions in his law. And if he, in his divine wisdom, foresaw the necessity of a succession of authority on down until his second coming, he would so have ordered it, and prophecy and history would have confirmed it. But to the contrary, the church ceased to exist as an organization, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit entirely ceased. Other denominations sprung up claiming to be the church, and have endeavored to prove a succession of authority; viz.:

The Latin and Greek Churches claim their authority from Peter. If this claim be authentic, why have they introduced a new *regime* with an entirely different doctrine from that which was preached by Peter?

(a) See Acts 2: 38; Mark 1: 4, 5. Mosheim's Ecclesiastical History, p. 54, par. 2.

(b) See Acts 8: 14-18. Ibid. 19: 5, 6. Mosheim 4: 9.

(c) See 1 Cor. 12: 1-11. Mosheim 4: 9. Mark 16: 17, 18.

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Neither of these churches possesses any of the characteristics in common with the kingdom of God.

The Episcopal Church claims a succession of authority from Paul. It certainly is presumptuous in them to make such a claim, when they cannot prove a succession of priesthood; their church organization and doctrine are as different from the order of faith that Paul represented, as possible; Paul's anathema is sure to fall on them:—

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.—Gal. 1: 8.

The Baptists claim their authority from John the Baptist. Why they claim John as the author of their church through a succession of ordinations, is the quandary; John never organized, nor authorized anyone to organize a church; he only was sent to prepare the way for Christ. Our Baptist friends have sadly failed in their attempt to prove a succession of authority from John the Baptist.

We do not at this time propose to trace through history the many changes of these churches, but suffice it to say that at no time of their history can they present any of the characteristics that marked the Church of Christ. At no time have they dared to call their churches after his name; but have sought names more suitable to their purpose. All the so-called orthodox churches are the outgrowth of these churches, consequently have no command; neither do they claim authority direct from God.

### PROPHECY AND HISTORIC FACTS ONLY CAN SOLVE THE QUESTION.

In penning these pages our object is to set forth the outline of the prophecies of scripture in connection with the historic fact relative to the apostasy of the church. Christ declared:—

From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.—Matt. 11: 12.

Paul forewarned his Ephesian brethren of the threatened apostasy:—

For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.—Acts 20: 29.

Also, admonishing them to beware of spirit manifestations, teachers, and letters purporting to be the teachings of the apostles, saying that the coming of Christ was at hand, when his temporal power would be exercised in their behalf in rescuing them from the powers that be, and commence a universal reign of peace. Paul enters a demurrer to this system of teaching, setting it aside as unauthorized, and speaking as one with authority: "That there must come a falling away first from the true faith."

The history of the dark ages should suffice to establish this fact, and Christianity divided into so many churches, each one antagonistic to the other, and without any authority from God, should satisfy the most incredulous of the apostasy.

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means; for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first.—2 Thess. 2: 1-3.

Also:—

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.—1 Tim. 4: 1.

Also: Paul warning Timothy of the impending danger to the church, exhorts him to proclaim the word of God, let it cut as a sword, rebuke them who gave heed to false teachers, for an apostasy was imminent, when men would form churches without authority, after their own ideas, send money calls to uninspired teachers, whom men have named Reverend, to come and preach their preconceived opinions in the form of disciplines or articles of faith, whose preaching shall be to deny the necessity of apostles and prophets, to constitute God's visible body on earth; also deny the gifts of the gospel as being essential to the life of that body, and denying that Jesus said these signs should follow the

faithful to the end of time. But their teaching was to amount to fables, as this quotation will show:—

The New York *Methodist* relates the following colloquy as real and not imaginary, and thinks the repetition of it may have a good practical effect by opening the eyes of some good people to their position. Have you had a revival in your church? No; the minister does not believe in them. Well, what are you doing? O, we are having the grandest fair you ever saw; the seats are all taken up in the church; we have a promenade concert every night, and a shooting gallery, and a grab bag, and a post office, and the ladies dress up in all sorts of old-fashioned costumes; we expect to clear \$1,200. What is to be done with it? It is to fit up the church parlor.

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season, out of season reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lust shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.—2 Tim. 4: 1-4.

Ninety-six years after Christ, when the Apostle John was banished to the island of Patmos, God, through vision, permitted him to review the church, and in announcing his researches he states that he discovered only seven churches in all Asia; and but few of these were acceptable to God. After this the future was unfolded, and in Revelation twelfth, the church was presented to him in the form of a woman with child, clothed with the sun (the light of revelation), the moon under her feet (the Mosaic law), a crown of twelve stars (emblematical of the twelve apostles). A great red dragon (the Roman Pagan Power that so often shed the innocent blood of the saints), stood ready to devour the child as soon as it was born (the power transmitted to the church which the Papal Roman Power, which succeeded the Pagan, claims to have received from Peter), but God caught the man child up to his throne, and the woman, divested of her authority (administrative), fled into the wilderness, where she had a place prepared for her, and in this lonely condition, divested of all authority, stripped of her beautiful crown, her precious gifts ceased. She was to remain for a specified time, and during the time of her inactivity, this Papal Roman Power that claimed to have obtained authority from Peter, steps forth representing herself as Christ's bride; but John describes her as a harlot and a mother. Hence, all who have come from her and represent themselves as the church of Christ, but claiming some other name, are also classed as strange women. Thus the church is lost from mortal sight, and a universal reign of darkness ensues. Mosheim in his church history corroborates what Christ and the apostles predicted:—

The Christian Church was scarcely formed when, in different places, there started up certain pretended reformers, who, not satisfied with the simplicity of that religion which was taught by the apostles, meditated changes of doctrine and worship, and set up a new religion drawn from their own licentious imagination.—Chapter 5: 1, page 129.

Infant baptism by sprinkling was admitted in the latter part of the second century, in lieu of adult baptism by immersion, during the first part of this century. In the fourth century,

Constantine . . . assumed to himself the supreme power over this sacred body [the Christian church], and the right of modeling and governing it in such a manner as should be most conducive to the public good. This right he enjoyed without any opposition.—Moshier, vol. II. chap. 3, par. 1; also par 2.

Constantine began to introduce innovations into the forms of ecclesiastical discipline, and to change the ancient government of the church.—*Ibid.* chap. 4: 2.

No sooner had Constantine the Great abolished the superstitious of his ancestors, than magnificent churches were everywhere erected for the Christians, which were richly adorned with pictures and images.

The Church of England states in one of her homilies, "Homily on the Perils of Idolatry":—

The laity and clergy, learned and unlearned, men and women, and children of all ages, sects and degrees, of whole christendom, have been at once buried in the most abominable idolatry (a most dreadful thing to think), and that for the space of eight hundred years or more.

John Wesley in his ninety-fourth sermon states the same in substance:—

The real cause why the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost were no longer to be found in the Christian church was because the Christians were turned heathen again, and had only a dead form left.

Now, to show that the Prophet Isaiah was notified by the revelations of God of the condition of the world in the last days, that they would break the everlasting covenant, and the effect to follow was to destroy the world and leave but a few men.

The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; *because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant.* Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate: therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left.—Isa. 24: 5, 6.

It is evident from the few prophecies we have cited, and the few historical facts we have rehearsed, that an entire apostasy has ensued; hence a restoration of that ancient order is necessary. John predicts such an event:—

And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people. Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him, for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.—Rev. 14: 6, 7.

That such an event was seen by John to take place in the far distant future, no one will deny. An angel with the authority to commission man to proclaim the everlasting gospel. Angels were the means God used in all ages of the world to bestow authority upon man; hence no change was, or could be expected; when this angel visits earth, the work of restoration will be visible to all men. They will authorize men to organize the kingdom anew, with apostles, prophets, high priests, seventies, elders, priests, teachers, and deacons. The e will be sent forth to preach the same gospel that was preached eighteen hundred years ago. Faith in God, repentance from sins, baptism for the remission of sins, the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost, and the Spirit separating, giving to each one a gift as it did anciently. The name of the body of Christ's Church, kingdom, or bride (which are synonymous), will be called by his name, Jesus Christ. It will possess all the gifts, blessings, privileges, and officers that it did in the apostles' time. So by an observation, it can be distinguished from all the churches of men, who have invented their own creeds, organized after their own ideas, named their churches to suit themselves; who call their own ministers, pay them their price, preaching to suit the people. How is it, that a sane man, with his Bible as his detector in his hand, can be deceived by joining the old Mother of Harlots, or one of her harlot daughters, and rest satisfied with such a system of confusion and distrust, is more than I can fathom. The churches of men were popular; and their members pride themselves in speaking of their church. But to the contrary of the Church of Jesus Christ. It has always been reproached, calumny heaped upon it, evil spoken of, no one who opposes it can tell the truth concerning it; persecuted on all sides, and from all the churches of men in every conceivable way; looked upon as composed of the dregs of humanity and the ignorant of the world; such are some of the peculiar characteristics of the church of the despised Nazarene.

#### WHICH IS THE CHURCH?

The question we asked in the beginning was, *Which is the Church?* I now propose to answer the question. In 1829, a holy angel, John the Baptist, appeared to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, and ordained them to the Aaronic priesthood; which authorized them to baptize by immersion for the remission of sins. After this appeared Peter, James, and John, unto Joseph Smith, and ordained him to the Melchisedec priesthood by which came the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. In 1830, by command of God, the Church of Jesus Christ was organized: Twelve Apostles were called and ordained, the High Priests' Quorum, Bishopric, Quorum of Seventies, Elders, Priests, Teachers, and Deacons. All these were sent forth on their respective missions, signs followed the faithful believer, in the form of tongues, prophesying, and seeing visions. The blind were restored to sight, the deaf to hearing, the lame to walking; discerning of spirits, wisdom, knowledge, and faith were exercised; and every officer and gift of the gospel that characterized the body of Jesus Christ eighteen hundred years ago characterized this latter-day church. A careful comparison of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints as it now is, with what it was in the days of the apostles, will surely convince the most incredulous that it is an exact facsimile, and the only appointed church of God.

Hoping you may see its beauties and realize its power to save to the uttermost.

I remain yours

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