

Continuing In the Apostles’ Doctrine

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The Christian church is the worldwide community of believers in the one God, our Father, and the one Lord, Jesus Christ. This community of believers originally began as a small group of disciples of Jesus Christ which he taught and led during his earthly ministry. Later, after his death, resurrection and giving of the Spirit on Pentecost, this small community of believers expanded to encompass a community of believers throughout the world.

From the very beginning of his ministry Jesus knew the mission for which God had sent him as the Christ of God – that is, to be the savior of the world. Therefore, from this group of disciples Jesus specifically chose twelve men to be his apostles so that they could become the leaders of the first century church. These men were to set forth the foundational teachings of the church for generations of believers to come. The books of Luke and Mark record the importance and significance of Christ’s calling of his apostles:

One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated as apostles: Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor. (Luke 6:12-16 NIV)

Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted and they

came to him. He appointed twelve – designating them apostles – that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons (Mark 3:13-15)

Throughout his life Jesus taught his apostles by both word and deed, and specifically prepared them for their future ministry which would begin with the pouring out of God’s Spirit at Pentecost.

Let there be no doubt, however, Jesus himself is the founder, foundation, and cornerstone of the Christian church. The Christian church is built on him alone. This is clear from the New Testament Scriptures, as we see specifically in the Gospel of Matthew:

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of man is?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 16:13-19)

The Christian church is built on the belief and confession that “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.” It was the duty of the apostles of Christ to be faithful witnesses of, as well as bold proclaimers of, this central foundational truth.

Throughout the New Testament this same truth is proclaimed as being the central point of faith upon which salvation is received and the community of God's people is built. It is the teachings of the apostles of Christ based upon what Jesus himself did, taught and later revealed through the Spirit that enable believers through all generations to stand together in the unity of the Spirit and on the one foundation of Jesus Christ.

This devotion to the fundamental truths of the gospel as embodied in the apostle's teaching made it possible for God to act mightily in the lives of the first century believers. Immediately after Christ's death and resurrection and just before the day of Pentecost Jesus gave many further instructions to his apostles regarding their mission to come. The book of Acts explains:

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my

witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking up into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1:1-11)

The rest of the New Testament Scriptures show that the apostles of Christ were faithful to these instructions that they had been given. After the outpouring of God's gift of holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter, together with the other eleven apostles, boldly proclaimed the truth that Jesus was the risen Lord and Christ and that through him the long awaited day of salvation was now dawning. Those who accepted this apostolic message stood together in one heart and soul on these teachings of the apostles. As the book of Acts states,

They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer (Acts 2:42)

The ultimate result of this devotion to the apostles' teaching was that,

...the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:47)

It is this salvific message about God's redemptive work in Christ that is the central focus of the teaching of the apostles. Their teaching was in direct continuity with the Old Testament scriptures and was tied together through all that Christ himself had done, taught and commanded them to teach. Thankfully, today, we also have the teachings

of the apostles preserved for us in the New Testament scriptures. When we faithfully give ourselves to learning, living and teaching the New Testament scriptures we also are devoting ourselves to the apostles' teaching - just as the original believers of the first century church. In short, we are building our lives upon the sure foundation of Christ. As the book of Ephesians states,

For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens

but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. (Ephesians 2:18-20)

May we as the Christian church faithfully steward, preserve and make known those same words of life which the original apostles taught and which are now preserved for us, through God's providential care, in the New Testament scriptures.