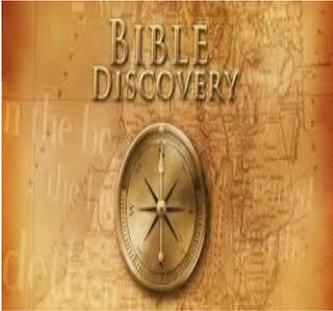


November 22, 2015

1 Peter 2:7-12

## God is Building His Church



One of the deepest of human needs is our longing to belong – to fit in – and to be a part of something beyond ourselves. We're born into families, some functioning better than others, we join organizations pursuing alignments, and we build friendships all because we've an innate nature to nurture that sense of belonging. As Christians we're set apart through the privilege of belonging to a special family – an eternal family; the family of God, His church.

Ask the average person what comes to mind when they hear the word church, and invariably they'll think of a building, usually one which is out of touch with

modern society both by design and function. Perhaps it brings to mind a wedding they attended, even their own, or the sadness of saying good bye to a loved one at a funeral. Yet nothing could be further from the truth for church is nothing less than God's family!

What do we mean by *church*? The universal church is made up of everyone who truly believes in Jesus throughout all time. The local church is the body of believers in a particular area who've chosen to gather together for fellowship, encouragement, and teaching. Nowhere does God's Word refer to church as a building or an organization. We see illustrations of the "body of Christ" or as a tree or vine, but not a manmade structure. So when I say God is building His church, I'm speaking about the people coming to Him through His Son Jesus who died as the payment due for our sins. The church is the vehicle through which we respond to the gospel. The Apostle Paul says the gospel in a nut shell is simply this: "*Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said. He was seen by Peter and then by the Twelve*" [1 Corinthians 15:3-5]. This good news that Jesus died and rose again to forgive our sins is what the gospel is built on as the foundation, the cornerstone of Christ Himself.

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So the church isn't a structure; nor is it an invention of Jesus' disciples in the first century or from the minds of contemporary thinkers. Paul wrote to the Ephesians telling them, "*For He (being God) chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight.*" [Ephesians 1:4] In the grand scheme to redeem man back to Himself, God chose the church thousands of years before Christ came to bring fruition to God's plan, even long before the beginning of human history. However, at just the right moment in His plan, Jesus revealed God's purpose and Jesus Himself brought the church into being. Our confidence then is not in well laid plans, corporate decisions or balanced processes, rather it's based on the promise of Jesus Christ Himself. "*...I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.*" Jesus builds His church and Jesus cares for His church.

Way back in time, King David was determined to build a house of worship for God. Even though an impressive temple was eventually built for Him by David's son Solomon, the greater, longer-lasting "house" and "kingdom" was established in Jesus, the perfect, sovereign descendant of David, who reigns forever. When King Solomon built the original Jewish Temple where they went to offer sacrifices for their sins, it was built by first preparing the ground, clearing the area, making sure it was flat and level. The "*cornerstone*" was the first stone laid in place once the ground was prepared. Then they built the walls in a straight line out and up from the cornerstone. The building was then the right shape. The walls were straight. We can understand then why Peter's able to relate Jesus to the cornerstone. Jesus is the point from which we build our lives straight and true and solid. In Solomon's temple, the priests offered sacrifices to God. To make a sacrifice they

killed a special animal and burnt it on an altar. Then they asked God to forgive His people. They did this continually – year after year. This was like a picture of what Jesus has done on the cross. Today, people don't need to kill animals as our sacrifice. Jesus was the perfect sacrifice once and for all time. He forgave all sins when He died. Now, people turn to Jesus in their broken spirit, with their broken and contrite heart, recognizing their need of a Saviour, confess they've sinned; and Jesus forgives them and restores their relationship with the Father.

**Jesus is the living fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, the precious Son of God.**

But Peter doesn't stop there. A little earlier in his letter, Peter called Jesus '*the living stone*'. Peter wants us to understand Jesus is the living fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, the precious Son of God. What can we do in response but come and worship Him? How has the modern Church responded to Jesus as our Lord and Saviour? If we would truly worship Him as His church, we must first remain with His gospel. It's important we never graduate beyond the gospel. It's tempting to think that believing in Jesus is necessary only for starting the Christian life, and we grow in Him by practicing spiritual disciplines such as meditation, memorization, journaling, and joining Bible-study groups. These are all important practices, but they'll draw us to Jesus only as we come to Him through His gospel. The closer we come to Jesus, the more we grasp what it means to be set free from sin and death by God's grace. If we forget this—if we think we're somehow earning our way to God through our spiritual disciplines—we'll lose our grip on the gospel and become a dysfunctional family. Don't get me wrong. This special family which is formed comes with all the ailments, all the frustrations, all the difficulties that can be experienced within any family unless the Church remains anchored thoroughly in Christ through complete acceptance of, and agreement with, the gospel.

To further explain how we remain in the gospel and centered on Christ as His Church, Peter says Christians too are to come to Christ, who Himself is the living stone, "*like living stones, being built into a spiritual house*". God lives in His followers; He doesn't dwell in a physical building. He builds a "*spiritual house*" with people. Being spiritual's linked to God's Spirit, not to a physical building. This spiritual house is His Church. As His people we become the church as we follow Jesus.

We come to Him in response, called as holy priests in service to our Lord. Under the Temple system, the Jewish priests were the only people who could go into the temple with fear and trembling where they worshipped God and prayed to him on behalf of the people of Israel. When the priest chosen by lot entered the Holy of Holies they would tie a rope around his ankle to drag him out if he died – having been struck down by God because he was unworthy. Talk about fear. They sacrificed animals to God for the forgiveness of their sins hoping it was enough and each year they had to come back. Now we worship the Lord with joy and thanksgiving knowing Christ Jesus has met our need on the cross forgiving our sins. Knowing we're freed from fear and trembling and we're loved by God, we don't need to sacrifice animals anymore; we don't need to sacrifice again and again. It is finished. Everyone can come to God through Jesus. Everyone can be one of the called ones. As surely as Israel was called out of Egypt, so we as Christians, God's chosen people, are called out – not from a country, not from a nation, but from sin and death; transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. We become "*a people belonging to God.*" Again, we need not fear for not only are we called out, but we're called '*for*' a relationship with God through His Son Jesus our Lord and Saviour. We're called to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him. We're called to enter in for worship bringing our "*praises to Him who has called us out of darkness into wonderful light*". [vs. 9]

We're called to bring ourselves as '*living*', '*spiritual sacrifices*' which we offer to God as our spiritual act of worship as Paul writes at Romans 12:1. That's why it's so important we gather regularly to do so. Being gathered together in this way isn't about attending meetings. If that were true, then we'd be little more than balls in a game of pool leaving the pockets once a week to 'click around' on the table before returning to each of our own corners. Being called together in Christ brings us into a depth of relationship with God which in turn impacts our deep trust and love for one another. That's because in Christ, the foundation is laid. He's the

cornerstone from which we build. But what do we then build? In our experience with Christ and subsequently with one another God's building His church through us as we...

### Give our whole life to God

Too often we're content to give God our left-overs; our little bit of cleaned up living while continuing to hold on to control of our lives and "fitting in" with the world around us. But it we're a royal priesthood, a people belonging to God; we no longer have that option. We must recognize that our citizenship is in heaven and we are but ambassadors on a mission for God here on earth. At Mark 12:30 Jesus summarizes how we are to live our lives for God – "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." When I consider that, I realize that doesn't leave anything left over not to belong to God.

### Praise and thank God

The Hebrews writer explains our sacrifice of praise by encouraging that "through Jesus, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that confess His name." [Hebrews 13:15]. Put yourself into the shoes of the priests of Israel as they went into the holy of holies, coming before Almighty God. Do you think they spoke of anything other than the glory and majesty and wonder of their Heavenly Father? Do you think they stood before the Holy Ark containing the tablets on which God Himself had inscribed the commandments handed down to Moses and grumbled, complained, felt belittled and beaten? No I believe they lifted their hands in exultation and gave praise to God who saved them from their sins. So we too cannot be beaten down, we cannot be anything but thankful to our Heavenly Father as we come before Him.

### Do good work and share what we have with others

The gospel message both gives and transforms life so as Christians we're able to love. As we live a life loving one another we do so in such a way even those who don't believe in Jesus as God's Son that we may not be slandered and that the pagans should be compelled from their hearts to glorify God on the day He comes. Peter knows they must for in that day every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord but we should encourage them and bring them to such understanding with joy and celebration. We should recognize that just as Christians of Peter's day knew tribulation, so may we. Charges of disloyalty to the state, upsetting trade, teaching that slaves are free, not participating in festivals and celebrating with the world because of 'hatred of humankind', holding 'antisocial values', even being called 'atheists' because they didn't worship idols – each of these finds its counterpart in the worlds treatment of Christians today. Can we do good work and share what we have despite the world's response? Can we love others to where they too will know and love Jesus Christ which is "on the day He visits" into their hearts? Oh that they may continually observe the good works and perhaps God will grant them repentance unto life.

Therefore I ask you today, **are you the Church of God?** Have you given all of your life to Christ? Do you love God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind and all your strength? And do you love one another as you love yourself? Then let us be the Church built upon the cornerstone of our faith – Jesus our Lord and Saviour! Amen.



God is calling us to be the church of God. If you would like to have more information or discuss further what God is calling you to be as part of His Church, drop us a line on email or call us.

*Blessings,*

*Pastor Dave*