

I Will Build My Church

The Purpose and Characteristics of Christ's Church

2 The Church is "One"; "Holy"; "Catholic"; and "Apostolic"- Part 1

January 12, 2020

Ephesians 4:4-16

4 *There is* one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling;

5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism,

6 one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.

8 Therefore it says, "*WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN.*"

9 (Now this *expression*, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth?

10 He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)

11 And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers,

12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;

13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;

15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ,

16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

To the Glory of God

Now about 3-1/4 centuries after Jesus rose from the dead, the Christian Church was faced with a titanic battle concerning the full Deity of Jesus Christ.¹ And what made this a very difficult battle was, interestingly enough, the fact that about 12 years earlier, the Emperor of Rome (Constantine) had supposedly converted and became a believer.

And the result was, that for the first time, Christianity was no longer an *illegal* religion. You see, up until Constantine issued the "Edict of Milan"², it was against the law to be a Christian throughout the Empire of Rome. And so, the first 300 years of Church history are bathed in the blood of martyrs. But with the Edict of AD 313, instead of being persecuted by the Government, Christianity became, almost overnight, the *preferred* religion of the Roman Empire. The thinking was, "*If you wish to cultivate favor with the Emperor, you must convert to Christianity, because he has.*"

Now the creation of "Christendom"³ had its own unique problems that we don't have time to get into this morning. But when the Government sponsored persecution of the Church ended, there was literally dancing in the streets. And many people assumed that with this new-found Freedom, that Jesus was soon to appear.⁴ Instead of Christian fathers and Church leaders being taken away in the dead of night, never to be seen again, those men were now *being promoted* to places of authority within the Roman Empire. And those States and Cities that had confiscated money and belongings and real estate from the Christians and their Churches were ordered to give it back, *with interest!* The Emperor also made it against the law to punish anyone who worshipped Jesus Christ on the first day of the week.⁵ So, for the very first time, believers flourished *materially, financially, and politically.*

But there was a drawback to all this Favor and Ease and Comfort. And it was as you might expect. With the elimination of intense Persecution, believers became enthralled by this world's goods. And as

¹ The "Arian Controversy".

² February, AD 313

³ "Christendom" is an unholy alliance between the Church and the State

⁴ In some quarters, the reign of Constantine was considered to be the Second Coming of Christ

⁵ It is important to note that Constantine didn't command Sunday Worship (as many cults teach). The Church had been gathering and worshipping Jesus on the "first day of the week" immediately after the Resurrection. Constantine simply ordered that this Worship should not be punished

they began to accumulate more and more stuff, they became lazy and worldly, and they had to change the way they lived to *accommodate* their new-found prosperity. And so, Prayer was placed on the back burner. *I mean, after all, surely this must be the promised Kingdom, so why pray? Why study the Bible? And why spend hours arguing over the finer points of Biblical Truth? God had obviously moved to give the Church a new season of Peace and Wealth and Prosperity, so why fuss about stuff that really doesn't matter anyway?*

And into this laid-back season of Comfort and Peace rose a man named Arius (AD 256-336). And from Arius came a heretical Teaching that became known as "Arianism" that attacked the full Deity of Jesus Christ.

Now for over three Centuries, the Christian Church had been teaching that Jesus was:

homousia...

... with the Father. And this Greek word is a combination of two other words; *homo* meaning: *same*, and *ousian* meaning: *substance or essence*. So, for three hundred years, under intense persecution, Christianity was unified in heralding that Jesus was *of the same Substance, or the same Essence* as that of God the Father. And this was simply another way of understanding that Jesus was/is fully God.

But Arius began teaching that Jesus was of a *similar yet different* Substance or Essence from that of God the Father. And, in effect, the Teaching of Arius made Jesus to be a glorified angel, or a sort of "demi-god". Arius had added a single letter, the letter "I", to the word *homousia* and created a completely different word, *homoiusia*

Now in the Greek alphabet, the letter "I" is called the "*iota*". And you may have heard different people say, "*There is not one iota difference between them*", when talking about two similar things. That phrase arose from this battle in Church history.

So, which one was it? Was Jesus of a *similar but different Substance* than God the Father, or was Jesus of *the very same Essence* of God? I hope you can see that this really matters. But in the climate of great Peace and Prosperity, the leaders of the Church were very reluctant to cause a stir or make an issue over something so innocuous.

The Emperor Constantine had actually ordered the Church to “fix this problem” so he could rest well at night.⁶

But God was faithful to His Church, and He raised up one man, a single man, Athanasius, to stand against the entire Leadership of the Christian Church which by that time had reached as far West as Great Britain and as far East as India. When Athanasius stood to not only defend the Truth about Christ’s full Deity, but also to rebuke the leaders for their Lukewarmness, he never dreamed of the battle he was facing. Because Athanasius not only stood firm against the leaders of his own beloved Church, but he also stood against the supposed newly converted Emperor and the power that he held, as he unashamedly *affirmed* what God the Holy Spirit carried along the Apostle John to write in **John 1:1-3&14**:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

So, the Christian Church convened a Church Council in the Asia Minor city of Nicaea (modern day *Iznik*, Turkey) in AD 325, and the leaders of the Church battled *for 42 years over a single letter of a single Greek word!* Now every time I read this or even hear about it, I weep, because I am convinced with every fiber of my being that the leaders of the modern church would not fight for 42 *seconds* over something like this.

Finally, after being cast out and banished three different times, Athanasius was able to convince the leaders of the Church to hold to the Scriptures and affirm Christ’s full and eternal Deity.

Now what made this battle so hard was that nobody cared. The common statement by church leaders was, “*Who cares whether Jesus was of a similar or same Substance, when God has obviously moved to give the Church such Freedom and Safety? Let people believe whatever they wanted to believe about Jesus.*” That was the sentiment among the leaders of that day. *As long as people love Jesus, who cares what they believe?* Well, God cared. And thanks be to God Athanasius

⁶ The Church historian, Eusebius quoted Constantine as speaking to the leaders of the Church, “*Give me back my restful nights*” as he was astonished that the Church he had just recently come into was on the verge of Division over this Issue.

cared. And I care. And I pray that you care. And so, finally, the Church *formally and officially* declared *Arianism* to be a heresy and cast it out.⁷

And as they began to write the "Summary Statement" (Creed) of all they discussed in the Council of Nicaea, they invited Athanasius himself to write the portion that reads:

[I believe in] one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only begotten Son of God,
Begotten of his Father before all Worlds,
God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God,
Begotten not made, Being of one substance with the Father,
By whom all things were made:
Who for vs men, and for our Salvation came down from heaven,
And was incarnate by the holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary,
And was made man,
And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate.
He suffered and was buried,
And the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures,
And ascended into heaven,
And sitteth on the right hand of the Father.
And he shall come again with power and great glory to judge both the quick and
the dead:
Whose kingdom shall have no end.⁸

... which defined what a person *must* believe about Jesus in order to be saved. So, the wording of the Nicene Creed is part of an effort by the early Church to define what "Orthodoxy" is. Now, the term "Orthodoxy" has to do with "Right Believing". So, the Nicene Creed is *part* of defining what people *must* believe in order to be in right standing with God. Another way of understanding this is to say that "Orthodoxy" is "Essential Truth". So, this section of the Nicene Creed is Essential Truth about "Who Jesus is."

Now what is *not* commonly known about the Council of Nicaea is that the leaders of the Church also sought to define what a real, biblical Church looked like. And so, at the end of the Creed it says:

⁷ Around 1870 Charles Taze Russell re-discovered the Heresy of Arianism; was deceived by it; and from him came forth *the Jehovah's Witnesses* that today number about 8.5 million souls

⁸ The anglicized version of the *Nicene Creed*; from *the Book of Common Prayer*; 1892

“... I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church...”

Now, sadly, there is controversy among many Protestants in our day surrounding the Nicene Creed. Some people *incorrectly* imagine that this ancient effort at summarizing all that the Scriptures teach about the Church was *invented* and is *sustained* and *used* only by the Roman religious system, and those who are deceived by her. And the main reason they think this way is because the Creed uses the word “catholic”. But their fear is unwarranted. The Nicene Creed was birthed out of the fires of a strenuous and faithful defense of the true Faith by the Christian Church against evil heresies, and the need to summarize profound Biblical Truths so that the average lay person might grasp them. And while it is freely acknowledged that it is not itself “inspired”, this Creed is a very useful Summary of what the Scriptures teach about various subjects such as:

- The Character and Nature of God the Father
- The Way of Salvation
- The Dual Nature of Jesus Christ
- God the Holy Spirit
- The Church
- Baptism
- and Last Things.

So, if anything, what is *wrong* with this Creed is not what it says, but what it *doesn't* say. In my opinion, the Nicene Creed doesn't go far enough to define Biblical Orthodoxy. And so, today both Catholics and Protestants can say the Creed with no hesitation, and memorize it, and quote from it freely.

And so *additional* Teaching should be added to the Creed to achieve a solid Biblical Foundation of Divine Truth. But that makes the Creed much longer and much harder to memorize. But, when properly understood, this Creed is entirely Biblical, and very useful to the believer in our day. It has been studied and used with great success by all those whom God used to ignite the Protestant Reformation, and was a substantial part of weekly worship and personal devotion in all the various Reformed Churches until the dawn of the 20th Century.

It is very sad that many half-truths and superstitions have arisen over the years that do nothing but keep people in ignorance concerning what this Creed is and is not. As the title of this Series would indicate, the effort I am making to begin this new year is to understand what the Holy Bible teaches about the Church. And so, the Reformed concept of "Sola Scriptura" has been employed.

The Issue with me is *not* who wrote the Nicene Creed, or even who uses it, but whether it accurately reflects what the Scriptures teach about the Church. And of that, there is no doubt.

So, the early Church taught that a real, orthodox, true, biblical Church has at least four main Characteristics. A true biblical Church is:

1. One
2. Holy
3. Catholic
4. Apostolic

Let's begin to examine each one.

1. A Biblical Church is "One"

John 17

1 Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, "**Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You,**

2 even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life.

3 "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

4 "I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do.

5 "Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

6 "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word.

7 "Now they have come to know that everything You have given Me is from You;

8 for the words which You gave Me I have given to them; and they received *them* and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent Me.

9 "I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours;

10 and all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I have been glorified in them.

11 "I am no longer in the world; and *yet* they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, *the name* which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We *are*.

12 "While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled.

13 "But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves.

14 "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

15 "I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil *one*.

16 "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

17 "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.

18 "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.

19 "For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.

20 "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word;

21 that they may all be one; even as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.

22 "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one;

23 I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.

24 "Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.

**25 "O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me;
26 and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."**

Now this "High Priestly Prayer" by Jesus is very important and an entire Study just on this Prayer would be appropriate. But for this Sermon, let me say that Jesus gave us several key words to consider. So, whatever else we might could say about this Prayer, it is clear that Jesus was *not* praying for the lost world, in general, but about a very *specific* group of people who had very *specific* qualities about them. Jesus prayed for:

- ✓ All those whom God gave to Jesus (**John 17:2b**)
- ✓ Those God gave to Jesus out of (from) the world (**John 17:6b**)
- ✓ Those who were God's (**John 17:6c**)
- ✓ Those who were "given" by the Father to the Son (**John 17:6d**)
- ✓ Those who have kept (or who *continue* to keep) God's Word (**John 17:6e**)
- ✓ Those who have come to know (understand) that everything about Jesus is from (of) God (**John 17:7**)
- ✓ Those whom Jesus gave the Words of God (**John 17:8a**)
- ✓ Those who received those words (**John 17:8b**)
- ✓ Those who genuinely understood and believed that Jesus came from God (**John 17:8c**)
- ✓ Those for whom Jesus prays- because Jesus does *not* pray for the lost world at large (**John 17:9a**)
- ✓ Those God has given to Jesus (**John 17:9b**)
- ✓ Those who are God's (**John 17:9c**)
- ✓ Those who are the joint personal possession of both the Father and the Son (**John 17:10a**)
- ✓ Those in whom Jesus is glorified (**John 17:10b**)
- ✓ Those who are in the world (**John 17:11a**)
- ✓ Those who are sovereignly kept in God's "Name" (Reputation) (**John 17:11b**)
- ✓ Those who are as "one" as Christ and the Father are "one" (**John 17:11c**)

- ✓ Those who have been sovereignly kept in God's "Name" (Reputation) by Jesus (**John 17:12a**)
- ✓ Those whom the Father gave to the Son (**John 17:12b**)
- ✓ Those who are sovereignly guarded by Jesus (**John 17:12c**)
- ✓ Those who will never perish (in an eternal sense) (**John 17:12d**)
- ✓ Those who have Christ's Joy made full in themselves (**John 17:13**)
- ✓ Those to whom Christ has given God's Word (**John 17:14a**)
- ✓ Those whom the world hates (**John 17:14b**)
- ✓ Those who are *not* of the world to the same extent that Jesus is *not* of the world (**John 17:14c**)
- ✓ Those whom Jesus prays to be kept from the evil one (**John 17:15**)
- ✓ Those who are *not* of the world to the same extent that Jesus is *not* of the world (**John 17:16**)
- ✓ Those who are sanctified in the Truth- the Word of God (**John 17:17**)
- ✓ Those whom Jesus sends into the world (**John 17:18**)
- ✓ Those for whom Jesus sanctifies Himself (**John 17:19a**)
- ✓ Those who are sanctified in the Truth (**John 17:19b**)
- ✓ Those who will, later on, believe on the Word (preaching/teaching) of those who were physically with Jesus as He prayed this Prayer (**John 17:20**)
- ✓ Those who are as "one" as Christ and the Father are "one" to the end that the world will believe that God the Father sent God the Son into the world(**John 17:21**)
- ✓ Those to whom Christ gives the Glory that the Father gave Him to the end that they will be "one" as Christ and the Father are "one" (**John 17:22**)
- ✓ Those in whom Christ dwells (**John 17:23a**)
- ✓ Those who are "perfected" in Unity to the end that the world will know that the Father sent the Son (**John 17:23b**)
- ✓ Those whom the Father has loved to the same extent that He loved Christ (**John 17:23c**)
- ✓ Those who are "with" Jesus where He is (**John 17:24a**)
- ✓ Those who see Christ's Glory (**John 17:24b**)
- ✓ Those who know that God the Father sent God the Son (**John 17:25**)

- ✓ Those to whom Christ has made known the “Name” (Reputation) of God the Father- to the end that the very same Love that God the Father loves God the Son will be in them (**John 17:26a**)
- ✓ Those in whom Christ dwells (**John 17:26b**)

Now there is only a single entity on the earth that fills all these descriptions: *The Christian Church*. So, Jesus prayed hard for His Church. And what Jesus prays for, more than anything else in this Prayer, is that every single person who is genuinely born again by the sovereign Act of the Spirit of God will be:

“One”

Jesus prays here that those who belong to Him (The Church) are:

- A. “One” with the Father to the same extent that the Son and Father are “one”.
- B. “One” with every other person who is also “one” with the Father and Son through the Spirit.

So, the Church will be “One” with Jesus in the sense that it will *agree* with Jesus, It will *love and worship* Jesus, It will *adhere* to Jesus’ Words, It will be *subservient* to Jesus’ Commands, It will strive to *emulate* the Characteristics of Jesus, It will *propagate* the Christian Faith around the world, And it will *defend* what Jesus taught from all detractors. So, it is in *that* sense the Church is “One” with Jesus.

But then all of the people of the Church are also to be “one” with every other genuine believer, *not* in their personalities, or their dress, or their customs, or other peripheral things that really don’t matter, but in the sense that all believers will eat the *same* spiritual food (the Bible), be birthed into the Church in the *same* way (the New Birth), believe and teach the *same* Essential elements of the Scriptures, and all will strive to obey the Voice of their Captain (Righteousness).

So, the Christian Church is “One” *primarily* because God is “One”. And so, the Church is to reflect the God Whom it serves. About 1500 years before Jesus was born, Moses wrote:

Deuteronomy 6:4

Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!

... so, one of the *primary* Reasons the Church and the members of the Church are to be "one" is because God is "one". But then the Apostle Paul carried this "oneness" even further when he taught:

Ephesians 4:1-6

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. *There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.*

We must understand that Jesus's virgin Birth, His sinless Life, His vicarious Death, His physical Resurrection, His bodily Ascension, and His ongoing Ministry of Intercession established a single Church. And every single individual who has truly experienced the Miracle of the New Birth is a part of that single Church. And, in the beginning, all of the many Denominations, and all of the different Ecclesiastical expressions simply did not exist. Every region or city simply had a *branch* or an *extension* of the one, single, Church that Jesus had created.

For example, in the Bible, we read about the "Church at Sardis", the "Church at Laodicia", the "Church that was in the region of Galatia", the "Church in Antioch", and Rome and Thyatira, etc.

So, what happened that now we have literally thousands of different groups- all claiming to be "the Church", and yet having tenets and teachings which all differ?⁹ How did that happen? Has satan *overpowered* the Church? Has Christ lost? And which Church is the "right" Church? We're going to explore all those Issues in this Series.

So, as the Apostles were ministering on the earth, the Church was "one." But this "oneness" was *not* based on personalities or even personal relationships. It was based on what these groups *taught and*

⁹ The Center for Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary estimates that there are currently around 47,000 denominations.

believed (Orthodoxy). So, in the beginning, even though there were powerful disagreements concerning many fringe or peripheral issues brought about by remaining sin in the lives of individual believers (such as Race and Wealth), the Church of Jesus was *unified* around its core Doctrines, around what it taught and believed. And, the *basis* of this unified Teaching was the Divine Truth of Scripture. So, Christianity was unified. And all believers shared what was called a “common Salvation” (**Jude3**).

For example, the very same orthodox Truth that was being taught to the believers in Jerusalem was also being taught to the saints in Antioch, and in Philadelphia, and in Smyrna, and in Colossae, etc. Nobody dared to challenge the Teachings of the Apostles, except a few heretics, and that kept the Doctrine of the Church “pure” so that during those first few formative years there was glorious *harmony* among all believers in the Church.

The Acts 2:41-47

41 So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

43 Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.

44 And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common;

45 and they *began* selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.

46 Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart,

47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

In the earliest days of the Church, in a particular city or region where the Gospel was preached, and where God's Grace had become evident through the Power of the Holy Spirit to regenerate, justify, and sanctify unworthy sinners, those called and chosen individuals

assembled themselves together on a regular basis and were simply called "the Church". There was no "*Baptist*" Church, no "*Presbyterian*" Church, no "*Pentecostal*" Church, there was not even a "*Non-denominational*" Church, it was simply "the Church", the single Christian group in that area or that region where all believers in that area assembled together and to which they belonged.

The Acts 8:1

Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

The Acts 9:31

So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.

The Acts 13:1

Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was *there*, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

The Acts 20:17

From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.

Romans 1:7

to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called *as* saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 16:1

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea;

Romans 16:5

also *greet* the church that is in their house. Greet Epaenetus, my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia.

1 Corinthians 1:2

To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their *Lord* and ours:

1 Corinthians 16:19

The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.

Galatians 1:2

To the churches of Galatia:

Colossians 4:16

When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter *that is coming* from Laodicea.

1Thessalonians 1:1

Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.

The Revelation 2:1

To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:

The Revelation 2:8

And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this:

The Revelation 2:12

And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:

The Revelation 2:18

And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this:

The Revelation 3:1

To the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this: 'I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.

The Revelation 3:7

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this:

The Revelation 3:14

To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:

So, we can see that the Christian Church was *not* "one" based on location, nor in the personality of its leaders, nor in their own personal relationships. So, in what way, or in what sense is the Church "one". What does the "oneness" to which Christ prayed actually look like? Perhaps it is best expressed in what Dr. Luke wrote concerning the early Church:

The Acts 2:44

And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common;

So, the early Church's amazing Unity was a unique and Divinely inspired *spiritual* Unity based on the unique and Divinely revealed Truth which was graciously given to the Church and the special and unique Relationship that God had with each believer:

Romans 12:3-21

³ For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.

⁴ For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function,

⁵ so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

- 6** Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, *each of us is to exercise them accordingly*: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith;
- 7** if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching;
- 8** or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.
- 9** *Let love be* without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.
- 10** *Be* devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;
- 11** not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;
- 12** rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer,
- 13** contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.
- 14** Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.
- 15** Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.
- 16** Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.
- 17** Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men.
- 18** If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.
- 19** Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "**VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,**" says the Lord.
- 20** "**BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD.**"
- 21** Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

And this unique "Oneness" and Unity was expressed in four specific areas:

The Acts 2:42

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Now the word "continually", as used in this verse, comes from the Greek word *proskarterountes* (Strong's #4342), which means: *to stay by*;

to persist at; or to remain steadfast with, and has the idea of an ongoing and consistent effort about something that is very important, and not simply something interesting or a novelty¹⁰. So, as we add the next word, “**devoted**”, we see that the early Church was devoted to these four things in a steadfast way and on an ongoing basis.

So, the early Church had four things “common”, or four things which united them together, and which united them to God. And so, these four things are what distinguished the Church from every other entity and organizations, even religious ones. And so, these four distinctions served to make the Christian Church unique and special and separate from anything and everything else in the entire world:

- A. The Apostles Teaching
- B. Fellowship
- C. The Breaking of Bread (Communion)
- D. Prayer

... so, these are the four main Characteristics that define the “Oneness” of the Christian Church. So, let’s examine each one.

A. The Apostles Teaching

Just prior to Jesus’ Ascension into Heaven, the Apostles were assigned a specific Divine Duty by the Lord, and given the Divine Power and Authority to carry out that Duty.

Matthew 28:18b- 20

... "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

John 14:26

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.

¹⁰(from *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Copyright © 1972-1989 By Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. All rights reserved.)

The Acts 1:1-9

1 The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach,

2 until the day when He was taken up *to heaven*, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen.

3 To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over *a period of forty days* and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.

4 Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "**Which,**" *He said,* "**you heard of from Me;**

5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

6 So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?"

7 He said to them, "**It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority;**

8 but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

9 And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

And as the Holy Spirit endued these men from on High in the Upper Room, God empowered and equipped the Apostles with a very *specific* Anointing to do a very *specific* Duty: *establish Christianity on the earth*. So, these men were not simply "members" or even just "leaders" of the Christian Church. No, they started it. And as we found out last time, God used these men, the Apostles, along with the Old Testament Prophets, to become the very "Foundation" of the Church. And that only happened *one time*. The Church was only begun *once*. It was only created *one time*. The Church was formulated only a *single time*.

So, just how did God use the Apostles (and OT Prophets) to *create* the Church? *Not* by them building church buildings. They were used by God to establish Christianity/Church on the earth by and through *what they believed and taught*. So, the Apostles didn't simply preach "anointed sermons". No, these men were used by God to receive (by way

of Inspiration), and infallibly write down, and inerrantly articulate, and fully explain and teach the New Covenant, which is the final, full, and completed Revelation of God to Man! And *that* only happened one time!

And everything that these men received and wrote down was given "Divine Credibility" through the various supernatural Signs and Wonders and Miracles and the various "Sign Gifts"¹¹ of the Holy Spirit which God wrought in and through them. Thus, the Ministry of the Apostles was very *narrow*, and very *unique*. And because God used these men *successfully*, and they actually *finished* their Ministry (they *completed* the Task that God had assigned to them), and Christianity and the Church was established on the earth! But because that is true, their Office and the Work they did *will never be repeated*. Because the giftings and the anointing that God gave to the Apostles so they could *establish* the Church on the earth are NOT the same giftings and anointing that we need now to *propagate* the Church and Christianity to every nation, tongue, and people group on earth.

And so, once the Church (and Christianity) was established on the earth, there was no further need for any additional Revelation to be received,; or for the supernatural Gifts and Anointings to continue. What the Church then needed was to take the already received Revelation of God and *propagate* it to the ends of the earth. And so, the church began the Labor that continues to this day. And within just 300 years from the Upper Room, Christianity was the *dominant* Religion in the entire world!

Yet even though there was tremendous growth, the Christian Church remained "One". There are several verses and passages that confirm that, from the earliest days of the Church, the people of God were being systematically and lovingly instructed in great detail by kind and patient Teachers about not only what to believe (and what *not* to believe), but also how to live their lives (Orthopraxy). And in order to remain "One", there was a fix "body of Teaching" that was used to instruct and equip the saints that was called "The Apostle's Doctrine". And this Teaching was *not* a peripheral or side issue. It was a vital and ongoing part of the Worship Service, and part of the individual believer's ongoing activity as part of the Church. For example, in **Romans 6:17** Paul gives thanks that:

¹¹ "Sign Gifts" are distinct from other Gifts of the Spirit such as "Ministry Gifts"

... you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed,

The Acts 11:26

and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

The Acts 18:25a

This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus...

The Acts 20:27

For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.

Galatians 6:6

The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches *him*.

2Timothy 1:13

Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.

2Thessalonians 2:15

So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word *of mouth* or by letter from us.

So, it appears that there was a defined and consistent body of authoritative Teaching in the early Church, and that there was also a way of *systematically* and *continually* giving that Teaching to the people of the Church. And it also appears that based on this authoritative Teaching being taught to the believers in a systematic way, there was great unity and "oneness" among the people of the early Church.

Now we know from history that the 27 Books of the New Testament were not compiled into a single collection until hundreds of years *after* the death of the Apostles. And the main reason the various Books of the New Testament were not compiled together was that nobody told them to do this. It was in response to another heresy that

the leaders of the Church saw the need to gather the 27 Books of the New Testament together so that *all* believers would have access to *all* the Books.¹²

Yet, we see in these verses, way *before* the development of the Canon¹³, the people of the Church were already engaged in ongoing, formal, and systematic instruction in the Truth of Scripture. So, from the *earliest* days of the Church there was a formal, complete, and systematic way in which the people of the early Church were being taught the Word of God, most probably through various "Catechisms."

1 Corinthians 14:19

however, in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind so that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue.

Galatians 6:6

The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches *him*.

The Acts 18:25a

This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus...

Now in each of these verses, the Greek word for "**instruct**", "**taught**", "**teaches**", "**instructed**", and "**teaches**" is *katecheo*. And it is from this Greek word that we get our English word "catechize". So, to "catechize" someone is to simply *teach* them *Biblical Truth in an orderly and systematic way*. And down through the centuries the *best* way to accomplish that effort is through a series of Questions accompanied by Biblical Answers and Explanation so that the student may learn the Truth of Scripture.

And my Goal for the Covenant of Peace Church is to *re-discover* the Orthodox "Apostle's Doctrine" and teach *that*, so that we too may be "One" with the Bible, "One" with Jesus Christ, and "One" with the historic, orthodox Church.

Amen. Let's pray.

¹² This was done, authoritatively, toward the end of the 4th Century and early in the 5th

¹³ The "Canon of sacred Scripture" is a fallible list of infallible Books (66 Books) and represents the "Rule" of the Christian Faith.

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The Covenant of Peace Church 13600 John Clark Road Gulfport, Mississippi 39503 228.832.7729
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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.