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**“The husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body” (Ephesians 5:23).**

## **The Church**

**Truth:** The church is Christ’s body; He is her head.

*Cobb’s Confession of Faith*: Article XII

Text: Matthew 16: 17, 18; 18:17, 18; I Timothy 3:14, 15

“We believe that a church of Jesus Christ is a congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel. The church observes the ordinances of Christ governed by His law and exercises the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in her by His Word. Her only ordained officers are bishops (pastors) and deacons, whose qualifications, claims, and duties are defined in the epistles to Timothy and Titus” (Cobb's Baptist Church Manual, page 81).

The church is important. Christ instituted the church during His personal ministry on earth. He commissioned her to be His representative in taking the gospel to every living person in the world in every generation. She has been and still is empowered by the Holy Spirit to enable her to do that work. She is made up of baptized believers in whom the Spirit dwells, and she is the visible body of Christ on earth.

### **I. THE CHURCH BEGAN AT THE HAND OF CHRIST (Matthew 16:17, 18)**

**A. She is built on the truth of His deity.** Peter's confession, “*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,*” is the great foundation stone (the “*rock*” of Matthew 16:18) on which Jesus builds His church. If He is not the Christ, the Son of the living God, there is no church. Without Him there is no Christian faith.

If someone thinks that Peter is the rock on which the church is built (as Roman Catholics teach) let him look at the spelling of two Greek words used in Matthew 16:18. *“Thou art Peter (Greek, “petros”), and upon this rock (Greek, “petra”) I will build my church.”* If Peter had been the rock, Greek grammar would require both words be spelled alike. *“Petra”* means a ledge of stone; *“petros”* means a small stone. Jesus said, “You are a pebble, but upon this great ledge of stone I will build My church.” It was a play on words because Peter's name means “stone, little stone.” The church is founded upon Christ.

**B. She is built by the personal ministry of Jesus.** *“I will build my church,”* He said. You see Him assembling the assembly as He calls Andrew, Peter, Philip, Nathanael, and others (John 1:29-51). You see Him setting up the structure as He calls the assembly together and designates apostles (Mark 3:13-19). You see Him enabling the ministry as He promises (Acts 1:8) and then empowers the church (Acts 2). You see Him continuing to enlarge the membership as he *“added to the church daily such as should be saved”* (Acts 2:47).

**C. She is empowered by Jesus' own enabling power.** The promise, *“the gates of hell shall not prevail against it,”* is exciting. It pictures the church on the offensive against the powers of darkness. The powers of hell itself will not be able to stand against the power of God in His church.

Jesus empowered His disciples personally during His ministry on earth (Luke 10:17-19). But He would not be personally present with them always. He promised another empowering, *“I send the promise of my Father upon you; but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high”* (Luke 24:49). He explained that, saying, *“Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you”* (Acts 1:8). The Holy Spirit came on that blessed Christian Pentecost described in Acts 2. *“With great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus”* (Acts 4:33). That one who *“is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think”* is working in us today to bring glory to God in the church (Ephesians 3:20, 21).

## **II. THE CHURCH EXERCISES THE AUTHORITY OF CHRIST (Matthew 18:17, 18)**

**A. The church is authorized to judge between right and wrong.** He said, *“I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven”* (Matthew

16:19). When differences arise between two believers, they should seek to settle it between themselves. If that is not possible, they should seek private counsel of one or two others. If that is not effective, they should bring it to the church. The church is authorized to judge the right and wrong of such issues.

**B. The church is authorized to exclude and restore members to her fellowship.** If an offender refuses to be reconciled in view of the wrong done, *“let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican”* (verse 17). Such scriptural action in which the church binds and looses on earth is recognized in heaven (verse 18).

The church at Corinth had a member who was guilty of serious moral violation. Paul advised her *“to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. . . . Purge out therefore the old leaven. . . . With such an one no not to eat. . . . Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person”* (I Corinthians 5:5, 7, 11, 13). The church did so when she was *“gathered together. . . with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (I Corinthians 5:4). The erring brother's heart was broken at the evidence of the church's abhorrence of his sin. He repented. Paul wrote, *“Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow”* (II Corinthians 2:6, 7).

The church acts with the authority of Christ when she excludes and restores erring members.

**C. The church has authority over her own members only.** *“What have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within?”* (I Corinthians 5:12). Each church must discipline her own members. She has no business trying to discipline non-Christians or members of other churches.

### **III. THE CHURCH BEARS A RELATION TO CHRIST (Ephesians 5:22-30)**

The message of Ephesians 5:22-30 is commonly missed when it is read today. We become so excited about what it says about the relation of husband and wife that we tend to forget it is given to speak of the relation of Christ and the church. Yet, Paul says quite clearly, *“I speak concerning Christ and the church”* (verse 32). What does it say about that?

A word of caution must be given. Much that is said of Christ and the church in Ephesians 5 applies to others than the church. For instance, verse

25 reads in part, “*Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.*” But Christ loves more than just the church; He loves the whole world and gave himself for all mankind. But what is said in Ephesians 5 applies in a special way to the church, even if it might have a wider application.

**A. Christ is the head of the church** (verses 22~24). The head is the control center of the physical body. Every member is subject to the nerve impulses which come from the brain. That pictures the church's relation to Jesus who is her Head. He controls all functions. Each member is subject to His authority and direction. The church is His body and He is her Head (Colossians 1:18; 2:19). His spirit dwells in her and expresses himself through her. Blessed is the church that functions under the control of her Head.

**B. Christ loves the church** (verse 25). He loves the whole world as indicated in laying down His life for sinners (I John 3:16). But in a special way He loves those who have responded to His call of grace. He has forgiven their sins. He has given His own Holy Spirit to indwell them permanently. Then there is a unique relationship between the Christ and the Christians who trust Him, obey Him, and make up His body. He does His work on earth through them as they follow His commission (Matthew 28:18-20). Yes, in a special way we can say, “Christ loves the church.”

**C. Christ died for the church** (verse 25). It was a voluntary act in which He “*gave himself for it.*” He “*gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father*” (Galatians 1:4). He “*loved us, and hath given himself for us*” (Ephesians 5:2). What a reason for the church to serve Him!

**D. Christ purifies the church** (verse 26). The “*washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost*” (Titus 3:5) was our permanent cleansing. But there is a daily cleansing as “*we walk in the light, as he is in the light . . . and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin*” (I John 1:7). He continues working in us to make us like our Savior (Romans 8:29).

**E. Christ plans to glorify the church** (verse 27). What a prospect that is! It will be more than was spoken of the ancient people of God, “*Thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty: for it was perfect through my comeliness, which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord GOD*” (Ezekiel 16:14). “*Arrayed in fine linen, clean and white*” she will appear “*as a bride adorned for her husband*” (Revelation 19:8; 21:2). The church has “spots and wrinkles” today because of her imperfections. But in that glad day she will reflect the glory of her Head, Christ Jesus our Lord.

**F. Christ nourishes the church** (verse 29). To nourish and to cherish

means to feed and foster, to keep fed and warmed. That indicates His personal and continuing ministry to the church. She eats of His flesh and drinks of His blood (in the spiritual sense of John 6:48-58) because He is her life and her strength. He supplies her every need.

**G. Christ is one with the church as His body** (verse 30). His Spirit dwells within her and expresses himself through her. She makes visible to the world the invisible realities of Christ, just as your physical body makes real to people your invisible spiritual person. We are members of His body (1 Corinthians 6:15; 12:12, 27; Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:24). What a privilege to be His!

#### **IV. THE CHURCH HOLDS FORTH THE TRUTH OF CHRIST (I Timothy 3:14, 15)**

She is the house (household) of God. We who form her membership are brothers and sisters of the same heavenly Father. One can be a true member of the church only if he is born again. That explains the fellowship of the church.

She is the assembly whom God has called out from the world. That explains the meetings of the church and the identity of each congregation as a particular body of Christ.

She is the pillar of the truth. Pillar indicates both support and display. The temple of Diana in Ephesus had 127 golden pillars, each the gift of a king. They supported the structure and displayed its magnificence. So the church is “*holding forth the word of life*” (Philippians 2:16), maintaining its purity and declaring its message.

She is the ground of the truth, the buttress that keeps the building square and intact. The church can teach the truth of the Bible and preserve its teachings by declaring them. Yes, the church is important. Respect her. Join her. Support her. Serve God through her. “*Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen*” (Ephesians 3:21).

1. How do you define church?
2. What is the foundation of the church in Matthew 16:18?
3. How is Jesus building His church today?
4. How does the church get power to witness?
5. How is church authority indicated in discipline?
6. To what authority must the church yield?

7. What is the relation of the church to Christ?
8. What does Ephesians 5:22-30 say about your church?
9. What is the church's duty regarding the truth?
10. How can your church function as the body of Christ?