

Christ, the Foundation and Founder of the Church

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In Akron, Ohio, the red neon sign read: "The Akron Baptist Temple, Dallas F. Billington, Pastor and Founder." Other religious groups trace their founding to human beings: Martin Luther, John Wesley, John Calvin, etc. The Roman Catholic Church ascribes its founding to Peter, the apostle, and falsely applies, to Peter, Christ's statement, "Upon this rock I will build my church." This study will show that Christ is both the foundation and founder of his church. Christ as the foundation and founder of his church is implicit in his teaching in Matt 16:13-19:

13 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

14 They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

15 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

17 Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. 18 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. 19 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."

Christ, the Foundation of His Church

Christ had just asked Peter, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter had answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." The truth—that Christ is the Son of the living God—came to Peter from the Lord's Father in heaven (verse 17). Christ then said in verse 18, "On this rock I will build my church." What is this rock? Christ the Son of the living God is this rock. Some will argue, to satisfy man-made theology, that the rock was Peter, whom they consider to be the founder of their church. The two Greek words PETROS, Peter a little stone, and PETRA, a rock suitable for a foundation, cannot be interchanged. W. E. Vine explains:

ROCK 1. *petra* NT:4073 denotes "a mass of rock," as distinct from *petros*, "a detached stone or boulder," or a stone that might be thrown or easily moved. . . . The distinction between *petra*, concerning the Lord Himself, and *Petros*, the apostle, is clear (see above). (from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright © 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers.)

When it is not obscured by denominational doctrine, the meaning here is clear, agreeing with other statements about Christ as the foundation of the church. Peter addressed the issue with the Jews in Acts 4:10-12. Peter, whom some erroneously think was the foundation of the church, was responding to the Jews following the healing of the crippled man in Acts 3:

It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. 11 He is

"the stone you builders rejected,
which has become the capstone [head stone of the corner in a foundation]."

12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

Paul taught this same lesson to the Gentiles; namely, Christ is the foundation of the church and only in him is there salvation. In 1 Cor 3:10-11, Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. 11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ."

Jesus, Peter, and Paul all concur. Jesus Christ is the foundation of the church.

Christ, the Founder of His Church

Jesus Christ is not only the foundation of the church, but he is also the founder of his church. In Matthew 16, after Peter had confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus said, "8 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." With the Day of Pentecost, after the resurrection of the Lord, came the establishment of the Lord's church. After Peter's sermon, after the multitude cried out what should they do, after they gladly received the word and were saved, the Lord added them to his church: "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved (KJV)." Acts 2:47.

Being saved and added to the church are one and the same, and only the Lord can do it. Why? Because it is his church, that he built and that he saved. For, "Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior." Eph 5:22-23. Christ builds his church of those that he has saved. It is, therefore, without contradiction that Peter teaches in 1 Peter 3:21 that baptism is the culminating event in the salvation process and Paul teaches in 1 Cor 12:13 baptized in the one body, the church. Peter said "And this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God." Paul teaches in 1 Cor 12:13, "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink." When the Lord saves us from our sins, he adds us to the church, which he founded and of which he is the foundation. Any church, founded since the Pentecost after Christ's resurrection, is not the church that Christ built.

Christ, the Founder and Foundation of Only One Church

In the modern world, many want to have salvation, but be saved in some church that Christ did not build. God by his great power, "raised [Christ] from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come." He also "appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way." Ephesians 1:20-23. His body is the church and there is only one—the one he founded on the day of Pentecost. Paul writes in Ephesians 4:4-6, " 4 There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Paul also warned about men who found and establish their own churches and about those who follow them:

4 For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere men?

5 What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe — . . . 6 I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. 7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. 8 The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. 9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. 1 Cor 3:4-9.

Conclusion

Christ said that he was the rock upon which he would build his church. He was. He said that he would build his church. He did. Paul said that we should not follow mere men. We should not. Those on the day of Pentecost cried out asking what they should do. We should cry out. Peter said repent and be baptized for the remission of your sins. They did. We should. The Lord added to the church daily such as were saved. The Lord will add us, also, to the church, which Jesus built, and which has Jesus as the foundation.

Study Questions

1. What are the two kinds of rocks spoken of in Matthew 16? _____
2. When did Christ found his church? _____
3. What two things occur when one is baptized? Give the scriptures. _____
4. Why are we not to follow men? _____
5. Why is it wrong for a mere man to start a church? _____
6. Give five synonyms in this lesson for baptized believers in Christ. _____