

When Did The Church Start (Matthew 16:13-19)

Society is confused as to what a church should be and do. This confusion is especially helped by the many denominations that exist today. Society is also being deceived about these things by those that refuse to use the Bible as their sole authority for faith and practice. Instead, God's Word is supplementary material, while something else is put forth as the authority.

God desires for His people to be people of the Bible (*II Timothy 3:16-17*). As such, God's people must adhere to, study, and apply the Bible to every aspect of their lives. This must occur especially in their churches.

One much-debated topic in religious circles is when the New Testament church started. This is important to the church's function and message. First, we must define what a New Testament church is. One good definition could be that a New Testament church is *a local assembly of Bible-believing disciples of Jesus Christ that have voluntarily gathered together for the purpose of fulfilling the Great Commission*. The word *church* means *assembly* in the original languages. Therefore, a church is not a building; it is a group of people.

With this understood, when did the church start? Did it start in **Acts 2**, where the Holy Spirit came to empower the believers? Did it start in 313AD, when the Roman Emperor Constantine declared a Holy Roman Empire that would be guided by a Roman Catholic (Universal) Church? Some believe these two theories. However, the scriptures state that the church started with Jesus Christ and His disciples, and was then empowered by the Spirit of God at Pentecost. In **Matthew 16**, we see Jesus dictating purpose and policy to His church.

I. The Owner of the Church

As we consider this passage, we can derive who owns the New Testament Church. We join a conversation Jesus has with His disciples regarding who He was. The Jews thought Jesus was a resurrected John the Baptist, Isaiah, Jeremiah, or one of the other prophets. Therefore, the Lord asks His own as to who they thought He was. Peter spoke up and confessed Him to be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus blessed Peter's confession and confirmed it, stating that He would build His church upon it.

Please notice a few things in this passage. First we must point out that Jesus was *not* telling Peter that He was going to build the church upon Peter. This is what the Roman Catholics believe; therefore, many Protestants also believe this untruth. This is where they derive that Peter became the first pope and was given the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven, which is not true.

It must be said that God would *never* build His church upon the foundation of any man! All men are sinners (**Romans 3:23**). We have offended a righteous, holy God, because we broke His Law. Therefore, we deserve to be judged for it in Hell (**Romans 6:23**). The only way we become righteous in God's sight is through the merciful, gracious work of Jesus Christ (**Romans 5:8**)! Peter was a normal man, just like us all. He had moments where he made Jesus proud and those where he fell into sin (**Matthew 26:69-75; John 21:1-17; Galatians 2:11-13**). God would *never* build His church upon a sinful man that could destroy it!

Instead, we must understand that Jesus is not stating that He will build His church upon Peter, **but upon Peter's confession**. Which is better and more trustworthy: to build God's assembly upon a *sinful man* or to build it upon a *perfect Savior*? The scriptures confirm this truth, by telling us that our faith must be built upon the Lord Jesus Christ (**Matthew 7:24-27; I Corinthians 3:9-11**) and no other. If we try to build our faith upon a pope, preacher, church family, family member, or anything else, that foundation will fail us and we will fall. Jesus abides forever and will *never* fail us; therefore our faith is secure in Him!

Lastly, we must understand who owns the church. Jesus told Peter that He would build His church. Notice that He did not say that *Peter* would build *Jesus'* church. It is a wonderful thing to realize that the burden of church building does not lie with the pastor, church, or denomination; it lies with the Lord. Notice that Jesus did not say that *Peter* would build *Peter's* church. The church of Jesus Christ belongs to no man. The pastor and church family do not own the church. They do not even own themselves, because they have been bought with a price (**I Corinthians 6:19-20**). Jesus does not even say that *He* would build *Peter's* church.

Instead, we see the wondrous truth that *Jesus* promises to build *His* own church. Who owns each local New Testament church? Does the Pope? Does the denomination? Does the pastor or the people? The answer is *no* to all of these! The One that owns the church is none other than Jesus Christ. Why is this true? It is, because He bought His church with His own blood (**Acts 20:28**). If we understand and apply this truth, it will humble us and put us in our place in our churches, we will submit ourselves to His Doctrine (which is found in the Bible), and put the Lord where He truly belongs!

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