

Sermon: Exploring the Origin of the Church of God
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Introduction:

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Do you ever wonder what makes the Church so special? Additionally, what is the role of the church in the world? Furthermore, why do we gather in this sacred place week after week, and why do we entrust our spiritual growth and well-being to its leaders? However, today, we will be inspired and challenged by the words of Jesus in **Matthew 16:17-19** to understand the significance of the Church and its authority. Moreover, we gather to reflect upon an important truth: **the True Church is founded on Christ alone**. In a world where attractiveness and external appeal often overshadow the essence of our faith, we must be vigilant in holding fast to the firm foundation of the Scriptures. Consequently, let us turn to Matthew 16:17-19 as our guiding text and examine the hallmarks of the True Church.

Matthew 16:17-19

17 Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. Besides, 18 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. Furthermore, 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.

Saint Augustine: "The Church is the body of Christ, and He is its head. In Him, the Church finds its life, unity, and purpose. Christ alone is the foundation upon which the Church is built." - Saint Augustine

Additionally, Augustine emphasized the belief that Christ is the head of the Church and the foundation upon which it is established.

Purpose: The purpose of this sermon is to educate and remind believers of the authority given to the Church by Jesus and to address common challenges to this tenet.

Context: In Matthew 16, Jesus and His disciples are in the region of Caesarea Philippi, where Jesus asks them, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" (Matthew 16:13, NIV). At this point, Peter declares that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and Jesus responds with the words in Matthew 16:17-19.

Clarification: Upon This Rock: Understanding the Authority Given to the Church.

The "rock" referred to in Matthew 16:18 is not Peter himself, but rather the confession of his faith in Jesus as the Christ. Peter's name, which means "rock," serves as a play on words in this passage, but the foundation of the Church is Jesus Himself, not Peter.

Consequently, this passage reveals two important truths: firstly, that Jesus is the foundation of the Church, and secondly, that He has given the Church authority to bind and loose on earth, with the backing of heaven. Besides, these words were spoken to Peter, but they have been passed down to all the apostles and their successors, the Church leaders. Moreover, this authority is still present in the Church today, passed down through the apostolic and ecclesiastical succession.

Why It Matters:

Understanding the authority given to the Church is crucial for our faith because it affects our understanding of the Church's role in our lives and the role of its leaders. Furthermore, if we do not acknowledge this authority, we risk placing our faith in our own understanding and opinions. Accordingly, rather than in the teachings of the Church and its leaders who are guided by the Holy Spirit. Additionally, we can also fall into the trap of individualism, where we believe we can interpret Scripture and live our faith on our own terms, without being accountable to the Church and its authority.

Common Challenges:

One of the common challenges to this principle is the belief that the Church is just a human institution, and its leaders are mere men and women who make mistakes and cannot be trusted with authority. However, this ignores the fact that the Church was established **by Jesus Himself** and is led by the guidance of **the Holy Spirit**, who ensures that the teachings and decisions of the Church are in line with God's will.

Moreover, another challenge may be the perception of the Church as being outdated or irrelevant, especially in a rapidly changing world. However, the authority given to the Church extends beyond time and culture, as **it is founded on the unchanging truth of Jesus as the Rock and the Word of God**. The Church has stood the test of time and continues to provide guidance and truth to believers in every generation.

Lastly, the claim that **we can have Jesus without the Church is a theological misunderstanding that undermines the divine purpose and design of God's redemptive plan**. While a personal relationship with Jesus is essential, **He has ordained the Church as His chosen vessel for corporate worship, fellowship, accountability, and spiritual growth**. The Church is not an optional add-on but an indispensable community where we grow and serve together to advance God's Kingdom.

Christ is the ultimate authority defining reality vs. Judaism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Islamism, Agnosticism, Atheism, New Era, etc.

To defend this principle, we can point to the historical evidence of the early Church, where the authority and teachings of the apostles were followed, and the Church grew and spread. We can also look to the example of the apostles themselves, who were eyewitnesses to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and were entrusted with passing on His teachings and authority to the Church.

Biblical Theological Framework for Christ as the ONLY Foundation of the Church.

I. Christ's Obedience:

The first hallmark of the True Church is that as believers, we are called to obey Him as God, Lord, and Savior is.

The second hallmark of the True Church is that as believers, we are called to obey Christ's Message and Mission. Let us remember the words of the Apostle Paul in **1 Corinthians 3:10–11**

"According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder **I laid a foundation**, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it, for no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, **which is Jesus Christ.**"

II. Jesus, More Than a Prophet:

Jesus is not just an idol, a prophet, or a moral example. He is the very embodiment of God Himself. **His omnipresence** reassures us that wherever two or three gather in His name, He is there with us (**Matthew 18:20**). **His omnipotence** grants Him all authority in heaven and on earth (**Matthew 28:18**), and through His powerful word, He sustains all things (Hebrews 1:3). **His omniscience** enables Him to know all things

without needing to be questioned (**John 16:30**), and in Him, all wisdom and knowledge are hidden (**Colossians 2:3**).

III. Jesus, The Eternal and Transcendent: **Why do we believe in God? Because of Jesus!**

Jesus transcends time and space for He declared, "Before Abraham was born, I am" (**John 8:58**). He is the Alpha and the Omega, the Lord God who is, who was, and who is to come, the Almighty (**Revelation 1:8**). In Him, all things hold together, for He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation (**Colossians 1:15-17**).

Call to Action:

Knowing and understanding the authority given to the Church should change the way we approach our faith and our relationship with the Church. We should humbly submit ourselves to the teachings and authority of the Church, trusting that it is guided by the Holy Spirit. We should also pray for our Church leaders, that they may have the wisdom and discernment to lead the Church according to God's will.

It's Standing Time St John. Are we going to worship the True God or Idols? Are we going to seek the kingdom of God first or give priority to our own agendas for personal advancement?

Are we going to live a life with biblical conviction? in a culture with shifting philosophical views? A culture that is moving from a Christian worldview to secularism at a very high pace. Do we understand the times we are living in?

Are we ready to speak the truth in love without denying the truth in the name of love? In other words, are we going to train ourselves to live in that tension? The tension between truth and love by resisting the temptation to withhold love in the name of truth.

Do not lean at Standing Time. Take a stand. We are not Michael Jackson!

Do not expect the world to change. The world is the world. Expect the Church to Be relevant, To be Holy, not To compromise the Truth of the Gospel.

Jesus is God the Foundation of The Church. If He is God, worship him; if he is God obey him; if He is God, serve him; if he is God allow Him to make a true disciple of you; If He is God support His Bride the Church.

Jesus is coming back with the Invisible Church for the Visible Church, and both are HIS, the True Church. Do you know the name of that Church? The Church of the Lamb. The Global Church. (**UMC & GMC**)

I am telling you if we are not founded in the Word of God; the Word of God that is timeless and the Work of the Holy Spirit, we are not a church. We are a club, sect, a cruise, not a battleship.

We often act and react as if the climate of the culture is the most important thing. It is not! The ultimate question is: What does living for Christ really mean in the 21st Century?

Learning from the Book "Unoffendable":

We should not be offended by evil, instead, we should be surprised by goodness. We should not expect nonbelievers to act as Christians, or secular government or president to act godly as spirit-led leaders. The problem lies not with the world, but with the church failing to define and live out its purpose.

Reclaiming the Church NOT the World

What is tolerance? Tolerance is the willingness to accept different beliefs and opinions. Some argue that certain aspects of "Workerism" can lead to a perceived lack of tolerance, where opposing viewpoints are

not respected. Open dialogue and respect for diverse perspectives are essential in fostering a tolerant society.

The phrase "the mushy middle" refers to people who do not take a clear stance on an issue while those who "take a stand" are those who have a clear and unwavering position.

What about homosexuality, abortion, racism, diversity, civil rights, and the Church? If the church is built in Christ, then the foundation of the church is Truth. A truth that is not relative, but objective and transcendent.

Cuba, North Korea Testimony. Share how the church is persecuted in these contexts.

Does politics have anything to do with the church? In times of persecution, we are called to suffer for the sake of the Gospel without complaining but using the Bible as our moral standard of life. There is a strong connection between politics, morality, and Christianity that would affect how we live our lives within the context of secular authority. Are we ready to pay a price to be vilified, canceled, or shamed?

This is an opportunity to prove that Christ is more precious to use than our livelihood, reputation, titles, salaries, and personal success. How precious is Christ for you? Our identity in Christ dictates that we identify first, as a child of God and a person of worth. We have many identities, roles, and conflicted covenants. However, there should not be any confusion about whose priority goes first. How our identity as children of God and members of St John impact other identities.

On what foundation, or identity are you standing when evaluating reality? **Christ or the World.**

In the Bible, there are passages that highlight the disciples' willingness to rejoice in suffering for the sake of Christ. One such passage is found in the New Testament in the book of **Acts, specifically Acts 5:41-42:**

"The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. **Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house**, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the **Messiah.**"

This passage illustrates the disciples' joy in enduring suffering and persecution for their faith. They considered it a privilege to suffer for the sake of Christ and His message, as they believed it affirmed their commitment and loyalty to Him. Their response was to continue preaching and sharing the good news, undeterred by the challenges they faced.

Moreover, we can also present the consistency and unity of the Church's teachings throughout the centuries, which is a testament to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As Jesus promised, the gates of hell have not prevailed against the Church, and its authority continues to be a beacon of truth and light in a fallen world.

John Wesley: "Jesus Christ, in his person, is the foundation of all our hope. We are built upon him; everything we are and do as believers finds its source and strength in him." - John Wesley

Wesley emphasized the centrality of Christ as the foundation of hope and embraced the belief that believers are built upon Him.

Conclusion:

Today, my brothers and sisters, we acknowledge our flaws and seek forgiveness for any incorrect representations or misunderstandings within our church. We humbly pray for God's grace and mercy to guide us as we strive to align our beliefs and actions with His Word.

Let us remember that the Church is not just a human institution, but a divine institution with a foundation built on Jesus Himself. It is through this Church that we receive the authority and teachings of Jesus and are connected to the body of Christ.

Let us hold fast to the teachings and authority of the Church, for it is through the Church that God continues His work in the world.

Closing Prayer:

Heavenly Father, we approach Your throne of grace with contrite hearts. We confess that at times we have lost sight of the true essence of the Church, focusing on attractiveness and external appeal rather than being grounded in Your Word. Forgive us, O Lord, and help us realign our hearts and minds to the obedience of Christ.

Help us to humbly submit ourselves to your Church and its leaders, trusting in the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Empower us to build Your Church on the firm foundation of Jesus Christ alone. In His holy name, we pray. Amen.

Benediction:

"May the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you" (1 Peter 5:10).

As you leave this place today, my brothers and sisters, remember that the True Church is not defined by its external appearances, **but by its unwavering dedication to Christ.**

Go forth and live your lives as a testament to the obedience and love of our Savior. May the peace of God be with you always. Amen.