

## **Does The First Century Church Exist Today?** by Jim O'Connor

"And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Matthew 16:18

A twentieth century reader, discovering this passage in the Bible for the first time, may have questions generated by what the Lord Jesus said. Did he build his church? If so, when? Does it exist today? If so, how and where? If it does exist, can I be a member of it?

### **Did He Build His Church?**

The answer to the first question is a strong "YES". Jesus does not make empty promises. If we think he does, then the scriptures — the Bible — become useless to us and we can have no confidence in anything he said. He doesn't make empty promises for he built the church as he promised to build. The church was established in the city of Jerusalem on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus. Read the second chapter of Acts for confirmation of this. Thereafter the church is spoken of as an existing, functioning, growing institution. It was blood bought (Acts 20:28), loved (Ephesians 5:25); Spirit inhabited (1 Corinthians 3:16); persecuted (Acts 8:1); suffered for (Colossians 1:24); praised (1 Thessalonians 1:3); comforted (2 Thessalonians 1:6-9); and warned (Revelation 2:5). It was not a Jesus of Nazareth fan club, nor was it a social club with religious rules. It was the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23), consisting of the saved (Acts 2:47), called the household of God (Ephesians 2:19), and existing for the grand purpose of preaching and serving that God might be glorified (1 Peter 4:11; Matthew 5:16).

### **Does This Church Exist Today?**

Certainly it does! Does Jesus still live? Yes, he does (Hebrews 7:25; Revelation 1:18). Does his blood still cleanse? Yes, it does (1 John 1:7; Hebrews 10:12). Does he still reign? Yes, he does (Hebrews 13:5). Do we still have his word? Yes, we do (Matthew 24:35; 1 Peter 1:23-25). Let me emphasize once again that the answer to all of the above questions is a very strong YES! And since we have all of the above YES answers, we again affirm that the church which Jesus established in the first century can, and does, exist in the twentieth century.

### **Where Is This Church?**

It can exist anywhere and everywhere that the pure word of God is preached (Luke 8:11), and is faithfully followed (2 John 9). It knows no racial, social, or gender boundaries (Galatians 3:28, for "God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:34-35).

## **Can I Be A Member Of It?**

Certainly! Anyone can! In fact, God wants everyone, in every nation, to be a member of it (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19; Ephesians 1:10). If you do what people in the first century did to become a Christian (Acts 2:38-41); and do what they did to remain faithful (1 John 1:7; 3 John 2-3), then it follows that you will be what they were and have what they have.

The New Testament scriptures reveal to us the nature, organization, worship, work and purpose of the church. The scriptures have not changed nor have the afore-mentioned things concerning the church changed. Not only is man not authorized to make any changes, he is sternly warned against doing so (Galatians 1:6-9; Revelation 22:18-19). Any changes made in teaching concerning the purpose of/for the church cause it to cease to be the Lord's church. It then becomes the church of the man or men who made the changes. A changed, counterfeit church will not prosper at judgment (Matthew 15:9-14).

Some will ridicule the idea of a first century church in the twentieth century. However, those who do so, do not understand the first century church nor do they understand the needs of twentieth century man. Progress, so called, has not brought a change in man's needs. We still need direction (Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 14:12), forgiveness (Isaiah 59:1-2; Romans 3:10, 23), comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3-4; 1 Thessalonians 4:18), hope (1 Corinthians 15:19). WE STILL NEED CHRIST!!

We dare not seek to "modernize" the church of Christ to fit modern man; nor should we follow those who are seeking to do so. One cannot "update" that which is never out of date. Study the Bible, obey what it tells you to do, and rejoice at being a part of a church that isn't subject to the whims of an unstable society.