

The Church You Can Read About in the Bible

The Authority of the Church

Intro: This year one of our themes is "The church you can read about in the Bible." Now we are looking at the question, "What did God intend that the church be and do?" What was His purpose for establishing the church? What is its nature? What is its mission or work? One way to answer that question is to look at the way the church is described in Scripture.

In our first lesson we saw that it is described as the temple of God.

In our second lesson we saw that it is described as the body/bride of Christ.

In our third lesson we saw that it is described as the kingdom of God.

In our fourth lesson we saw that the church is described as the household of God.

Each of these word pictures tells us something very important about the nature of the church and gives us a concept of what the church is to be and to do.

But ultimately the purpose and mission of the church must be defined by its head Jesus Christ. And here is a good time to speak about the authority by which the purpose and mission of the church can be established. How is the church's purpose and mission established? What is the source of authority for the church?

Human beings are inadequate to know the will of God separate and apart from divine revelation.

I know, O LORD, that a man's way is not in himself; Nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps. (Jeremiah 10:23, NASB)

For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God." (1 Corinthians 2:11, NASB)

Paul frequently speaks of the truth of God as a "mystery" indicating that it could not be known by man by his own efforts (1 Cor. 2:6-9).

God has never revealed his will to everyone personally; but instead has chosen to speak by agents, revealing his will to some that they might impart it to all others.

Heb. 1:1 shows this process of revelation at work.

"GOD, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways," (Hebrews 1:1, NASB)

Note how God spoke to the fathers (the Hebrew people) by agents (the prophets).

This means that the truth of God is objective, not subjective. That is, it does not originate within us but comes to us from outside ourselves.

The authority of God is manifest to us in the teaching of Jesus as His last great spokesman.

*“GOD, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.”
(Hebrews 1:1–2, NASB)*

First note how the statement contrasts the Law given by Moses and the prophets, and the gospel given by the Son of God.

The church believes all that Moses and the prophets wrote in the Law concerning the origin, history, and practice of the Israelite nation; but the gospel brings release for believers from the obligations to keep the Law as revealed by Moses and the prophets (Rom. 7:6).

The OT Scriptures possessed the authority of God for the Israelite people; but not for the church of Christ. The church of Christ is accountable to the law of Christ (1 Cor. 9:27).

Jesus claimed to have all authority in heaven and earth.

“And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” (Matthew 28:18, NASB)

The images of the church we've already seen are founded upon the preeminence of Jesus.

The church belongs to Jesus as the Christ.

The church is the body of which Jesus is head.

The church is the kingdom over which Jesus is king.

Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to His disciples to remind them of all that Jesus had said and reveal new revelation to them.

Jesus revealed the words of God while on earth.

He who rejects Me, and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day. For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me commandment, what to say, and what to speak.” (John 12:48–49, NASB)

But the coming Holy Spirit would enable them to remember what Jesus had said.

These things I have spoken to you, while abiding with you. “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. (John 14:25–26, NASB)

In addition the Spirit would provide new revelation from Jesus.

But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. “He shall glorify Me; for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you. “All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said, that He takes of Mine, and will disclose it to you. (John 16:13–15, NASB)

The apostles claimed to have received the Holy Spirit in order to know the mind of Christ.

“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man. For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE SHOULD INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ.” (1 Corinthians 2:12–16, NASB)

By the signs and miracles they performed they authenticated the message as coming from Jesus.

After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.” (Hebrews 2:3–4, NASB)

The spoken word of the apostles constituted the truth of God. As they spoke what the Spirit revealed to them, it was as if God Himself was saying it!

This message guided the NT church as the apostles proclaimed their memories of Jesus and the truth He was revealing to them.

Because the early church believed the apostolic message was authoritative, they copied and collected their writings for themselves and for future generations.

First century churches that received apostolic messages were encouraged to share them with other congregations.

And when this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea.” (Colossians 4:16, NASB)

This process produced a collection of apostolic writings that were viewed by the early church as authoritative. They were not made Scripture by the church; instead the church acknowledged them for what they were, writings inspired by the Holy Spirit!

God now speaks in His Son who came “not to destroy but to fulfill the Law”. Jn. 1:17 Saying this does not remove the function of the Law to show us principles of God’s dealing with his people (Rom. 15:4), to give the knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20), or to bind people under the power of sin (1 Cor. 15:56), to serve as a tutor to lead men to Jesus as Messiah (Gal. 3:24).

The NT Scriptures provide the complete and sufficient guide for the new covenant believer.

“seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.” (2 Peter 1:3, NASB)

The faith was “once for all” delivered to the saints.

Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. (Jude 3) As "Scripture" it is "God breathed and profitable for doctrine, reproof, etc." All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Conclusion: If we want to know God's purpose and mission for the church, we'll have to learn that from the Scriptures alone and not from any other source. God's will is made known to us by the revelation of Jesus and His apostles in the NT.

Any doctrine or practice not taught by Christ and His apostles and prophets is not of God. No man alive today can add one truth to the perfect revelation of God they have revealed to us by the Holy Spirit. No man or group of men has a right to stand as infallible arbiters on any issue of truth that might exist (whether papacy or a coalition of gospel preachers). No practice, regardless of how good it may seem to be to us can be allowed the sanction and practice of the church, if we are to please the Lord and live by His authority.