

THE BELLEVILLE MESSENGER

October 7

2018

What Did God "Establish"?

World scholars seem to agree that the church was established in Jerusalem, the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2) gives the record, and only a few with some creed to defend offer objection. But WHAT was established when the church was established? Foolish question?? Well, read Acts 2: carefully.

Any "dedication" services? "Chairman" appointed? Any of the "institutional" procedure one would expect if today's common conception of "church" were correct? It just isn't there.

Today the emphasis is upon the party— the church is something like a lodge, or "Royal Order of Saints"— a society, somehow related to certain buildings. This conception is missing in God's record of establishment.

Prophecies concerning the establishment of the church invariably refer to the relationship, or the basis for the relationship, between God and individuals. Isaiah says, "the mountain of Jehovah's house shall be established on the top of the mountains—" referring to the establishment of God's law for all nations (Isaiah 2:1-f.). The promised kingdom was a promise of peace according to divine government (Isaiah 9:1-f). The ransomed of Jehovah would walk in "The Way of Holiness" (Isaiah 35:8-f).

It seems many think of the church as something like a little red wagon. "Established on Pentecost" – it stood ready to roll, and people could jump in and ride to heaven. But somewhere along the line a side-rail broke, an axle was bent, the tongue came loose, and finally a wheel fell away. Luther tried to put the wheel back on, but further bent the axle in his effort. Others replaced the tongue with a new but different instrument – unsuited to the purpose and function of the original tongue. Alas, the church was broken down and out of service.

Then A. Campbell and Barton Stone determined to restore the church. They straightened the axle, replaced the tongue with an original model, repaired the side-rail and put the wheel back in place. Now people could again ride home to heaven.

Have I stretched the picture? Perhaps – but only to emphasize what I believe to be an entirely erroneous conception of the church established on Pentecost. This is a denominational concept. It glorifies the "party" and does not properly distinguish between faithful and unfaithful people.

The word "church" is a collective noun, and it "collects" people. But not just any people. Christ's church consists of "Saints and faithful brethren," "a people for God's own possession" (Colossians 1:2; 1 Peter 2:9). Of all the multitude gathered in Jerusalem, only those who "gladly received his word" and "were baptized" became members of the church (Acts 2:41).

Members of the church do sin, but they are expected to repent and pray God for forgiveness. Failing to do this, they are denied the fellowship of Christians. (1 Corinthians 5:) A congregation of Christians who, collectively, no longer act in keeping with God's will is unworthy of a name and place among the churches of Christ (Revelation 2:5). The Lord's church consists of people identified with the truth -- not just a people identified with a party.

What God established – truth – the New Covenant -- never changes (1 Peter 1:23-f). But the party – the people could fall away

(1 Timothy 4:1-f). First their attitude toward divine authority is altered, then their practices, then, usually many years later, their terminology. Because the rule is one thing, and the people who supposedly follow the rule is another, Paul said we must not measure ourselves by our selves (2 Corinthians 10:12-f).

One may "stay with the building" "stay with the preacher" "stay with the elders" "stay with 90% of the people" – and yet leave the church which God established. In fact, this is precisely the history of denominationalism with its creed-bound people.

Christians today need to restudy their conception of Christ's church. We must rededicate ourselves, not to some "party", but to the Christ, and to His cause. I must know the truth, and obey it, regardless of the action of others---"in the church" or out of it. I must remember that it is the purified and cleansed church – not the "party" – that Christ promises to save eternally (Ephesians 5:26-27). What God really established is firm and sure, and cannot be shaken (Hebrews 10:28). *✠ Robert F. Turner*



What's The Use? Why Bother?

Do you ever feel like the things that you do don't amount to much? Do you think that you aren't making much difference in this world? Do you get discouraged and wonder, "What's the use?"

A familiar incident from the life of Christ might help. John records the account of Jesus cleansing the temple of the moneychangers in John chapter 2. This was, obviously, very early in the "public ministry" of Jesus. Matthew, Mark and Luke all tell about Jesus cleansing the temple in the last chapters of their gospels - just before Jesus was crucified. Is there a contradiction here? No, it seems clear that Jesus did this twice.

Armed with this understanding, we might ask, "What's the use?" He cleansed the temple once, and the moneychangers just came right

back. We might be tempted to think, "Why bother?"

The first answer to this question is: you do what's right because it IS right! No matter how little the result you might see from your effort, you must keep on doing what is right. Jesus understood this, and so must we.

Also, we notice that this work of cleansing the temple did have a positive influence - if not on the moneychangers, at least on the disciples of Jesus. ". . . his disciples remembered that it was written, "the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up" (John 2:17). They were there. They saw this and were impressed by it. When we stand up for what it right, others will see it, and our example will have a positive effect on some.

Finally, we challenge the whole notion that doing right "doesn't do any good." In the case of Jesus cleansing the temple, it did good in the near term. The temple was free, at least for a time, of the corrupt moneychangers. Yes, it had to be done again later. But for that moment it helped. When we do good, it helps. And we should never "be weary in well doing" (Galatians 6:9), but rather be "steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 15:58). *✠ Greg Gwin*

Belleville church of Christ
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Schedule of Services

Sunday Bible Study	9:30 a.m.
Sunday Morning Worship	10:30 a.m.
Sunday Evening Worship	5:00 p.m.
Wednesday Bible Study	7:00 p.m.

Evangelist

James Hahn	(317) 443-1938
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