

A NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH (Continued)

"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.

In the previous message I pointed out two things with reference to A New Testament Church. For those who did not hear that sermon, let me mention them again.

1. The Origin of the Church.

The church is of divine origin. Christ called it into being and committed to it a positive and well-defined mission.

- (1) Christ founded the church at the right time--during His personal ministry on the earth.
- (2) Christ founded the church in the right place--Jerusalem, Palestine.
- (3) The church was founded by the right person--Jesus Christ.
- (4) The church was constituted out of the proper material--believers in Christ who had been baptized in obedience to His command and who were willing to carry forward His work in the world.

2. The Nature of the Church.

In the New Testament the word "church" always refers to people. These people are redeemed, baptized, and voluntarily associated for the worship and service of God.

- (1) The church is a divine institution.
- (2) The church is a spiritual organism.

In view of the fact that there are three institutions which belong to God in a very special way, it will be good for us to distinguish between them.

I. The Family Of God.

The family of God includes all the children of God in heaven and on earth. In Ephesians 3:15 Paul speaks of "the whole family in heaven and on earth." This is the only reference in the New Testament to the family of God. This family includes all the saved, both in heaven and on earth. "Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." All believers are God's children. Since the Old Testament saints were saved by faith in Christ, they are all members of God's family. "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." Acts 10:43.

God's family is bigger than the kingdom or the church. It contains all the saved from Abel to the last person who has believed. God has only one family. All believers are children of God.

Men get into the family of God by birth. He who has been "born into the family of God by the new birth" is a child of God. As a child of God, he is an heir of God. Paul said, "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." Romans 8:17. He who has been born into the family of God is a new creature. "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." II Corinthians 5:17.

In connection with Christ there are three states of the human soul: the first is without Christ, this is the state of nature; the second is in Christ, this is the state of grace; the third is with Christ, this is the state of glory. One can never be with Christ in glory until he is first in Christ in grace. Getting into Christ is a matter of divine operation. It requires the grace of God to make a Christian. When one is saved, all things are seen in a new light and have a new meaning. A Christian sees, thinks, feels and acts differently.

II. The Kingdom Of God.

In order for a kingdom to exist two things are essential: first, a king; second, subjects over which a king is to reign. In the kingdom of God the Lord Jesus Christ is king and reigns in the lives of His subjects. His subjects are the born-again on earth at any one given time. "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." John 3:3. The kingdom of God is composed of all the born-again on earth. It is composed only of those who have been born again, who have been translated out of darkness into the kingdom of His dear Son." Except a man be born from above he can neither see nor enter the kingdom of God. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

The family of God includes all the saved of all the ages, whether in heaven or on earth; the kingdom of God includes that part of the family of God which are on earth now. All believers on the earth at any given time since the days of John the Baptist compose the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God began with John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ. "In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Matthew 3:1-2. "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached." Luke 16:16.

The kingdom of God is entered by the new birth. The new birth is the work of the Holy Spirit by the word of truth. "Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 18:3. "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever." I Peter 1:23.

The kingdom of God is a present kingdom. It exists at the present time and is to be preached. The kingdom of God is invisible. "And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you." Luke 17:20-21. That is to say that Christ is in the heart to reign.

III. The Church Of God.

The church of God is an expression which is never used of any institution except an assembly or congregation of baptized believers in some given locality. "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours." I Corinthians 1:2. A local, individual church is the only kind of a church God has on this earth today.

There is only one family of God, composed of all of the redeemed of all the ages in heaven and on earth. There is only one kingdom of God, composed of all the born-again on the earth now. There are multiplied thousands of churches of God on earth. When a man is born again he is born into God's family. He is a child of God and a member of His family forever. The relationship does not change. Whether in heaven or on earth he is in God's family.

When a man is born again he also enters God's kingdom. This relationship is for life. When he dies he passes out of the kingdom of God on earth and enters His heavenly kingdom. "And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever." II Timothy 4:18. After he has been

born again he is not yet in a church, but is now a scriptural subject for admission into a New Testament church. "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." Acts 1:47. Church membership was not something a person got with salvation, but a subsequent blessing after salvation by being added to the church.

People are born into the family of God and into the kingdom of God, but they are baptized into a church of God. A New Testament church is entered only through baptism. One should enter the family of God and the kingdom of God before entering the church of God. Some enter the family of God and the kingdom of God but never enter a New Testament church. On the other hand, some enter a New Testament church who have not entered the family of God and the kingdom of God. Judas Iscariot is an example of this.

Whereas the kingdom of God is invisible, the church is visible and local. It can be seen convening to worship, to attend to business matters, to elect officers, to receive members, and to administer the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

If we are to understand intelligently and truthfully the truth as taught in the New Testament, it will be necessary for us to see the clear distinction between the church and the kingdom. Ever remember that the family of God is composed of all the saved in heaven and on earth. Old Testament saints and babies who died before reaching the age of accountability are in God's family, although they were never in the kingdom of God or in any New Testament church. All believers on earth at any given time since the days of John the Baptist compose the kingdom of God. Only baptized believers are members of New Testament churches.

A New Testament church is spiritual in that it is composed of those who have had a spiritual experience. No one is qualified for membership in a New Testament church until he has been born again.