

Upon Which Foundation?

By Michael Clark

At this time in certain circles, a great emphasis is being placed on the restoration of the "offices" of apostles and prophets. The reasoning is that if these two "offices" are restored to their rightful place, the Church can once again be built up. Is the restoration of these so-called "offices" necessary for the building up of the Church? Or do we really need to restore Jesus as the only foundation for the Church? (Note: I say "so-called offices" because the word office is not found in the original language of the New Testament, except where it applies to the worldly office of the tax collector.)

I personally have wrestled with this issue. Like many of you, I grew up with an identity crisis caused by a dysfunctional family. I have longed for an identity of my own. My struggle centered on whether I would find my life or lose it, as Jesus commands those who want to be his disciples. As the prophetic began to manifest in me, the struggle intensified. It took years of fighting the need to be someone to finally come down on Jesus' side of the issue.

Let us consider two of Paul's letters where he speaks of the foundation of the Church, Ephesians and First Corinthians.

And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:17-22, NKJV).

According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If

anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. (1 Corinthians 3:10-14, NKJV).

With a casual glance it seems that Paul is contradicting himself in Ephesians 2:20 and 1 Corinthians 3:11. In the one passage he seems to say that the apostles and prophets are the foundation of Jesus' holy temple, the Church, and in the other he seems to be saying there is no other foundation that can be laid for God's holy building other than Jesus Christ. If we look closely at the two verses together, we can see that Paul was saying that he and other workers of the gospel laid the foundation of Jesus Christ in the hearts of believers, and not the foundation of themselves.

Paul said, "I have laid the foundation." He laid the foundation as an apostle. If Acme Concrete lays a foundation of concrete, it is said to be "their" foundation. The workers who laid it are not THE foundation. The building is constructed on their foundation, not on THEM. So it is with "the foundation of the apostles and prophets." Christ is the foundation they lay. Paul is saying that Jesus is not only the akrogoniaios or "corner foundation stone" of God's temple, but He is also the themelios, the only "foundation" on which it is built.

For centuries men have preached a "gospel" that is man centered. Today we hear from our pulpits how important men are to the kingdom of God, and less about how important Jesus is to God's plan. This message is preached by example as well as words. Paul told the Church, "For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." Let's see where Paul focuses our attention in this second chapter of Ephesians.

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh--who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands--that at

that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:4-22, NKJV).

As you can see, Paul is speaking over and over of the preeminence of Christ and God's work through Christ. Only once in twenty-two verses is there a mention of apostles and prophets. Paul repeatedly draws our attention to the importance of Jesus and not to himself.

Since the early days of the Church when the first apostles and prophets passed on, men have been taking more and more attention to themselves and placing less and less emphasis on Jesus. Even while the last of the original twelve, John, was still alive, men were starting to rise up, loving the preeminence over their fellow men. John wrote:

I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church. Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God. (3 John 1:9-11, NKJV).

Now who should have preeminence in the Church? The apostle or Christ? Who should we "imitate"? Only God is good. Paul writes to the Colossians,

He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. (Colossians 1:13-18, NKJV).

It is all HIM! It is all Jesus Christ. Only He paid the price for our redemption. Only He is the perfect image of the invisible God. Only He is the Creator of all things and is above all things. Only in Him are all things. Only He was before all things. **ONLY BY HIM DO ALL THINGS CONSIST! ONLY CHRIST JESUS IS THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH** that in all things **HE MAY HAVE THE PREEMINENCE!** Now is that plain enough? It is not about men. It is not about offices! It is all about Jesus Christ. He is the foundation. We are the walls of the temple. He is the cap stone. He is the Church and in Him do we consist. We are His body. He is the Head.

Consider the example of John the Baptist. Jesus said, "among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist." Yet John saw it was imperative that he decrease and not allow himself to be a distraction from the preeminence of Jesus Christ. Can you see that being such a distraction makes you a thief and a robber in the Church? This is what Jesus was saying in John 10.

Then Jesus said to them again, "Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who [ever] came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them." (John 10:7-8, NKJV).

The word translated "came" in verse eight is the Greek word *erchomai*. It means "to come," not came. The word "ever" is not in the original text. So Jesus is saying, "I am the door to the sheep fold and all who come before me [in preeminence] are thieves and robbers." His sheep are to hear His voice and no other. It is because men steal that place of Christ and dominate His flock that we have all the controversy and division in the Church today. There are many so-called "bodies" because there are many heads. Anyone who steals the place of Christ over His body is following the spirit of antichrist, the one who takes the place of Christ. As John warned,

Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. (1 John 2:18-19, NKJV).

"They went out from us...that they might be made manifest." The Greek word translated "might be made manifest" is *phaneroo*. It means "to show ones self." The antichrist spirit is of Satan himself, the one who came out of the fellowship of the cherubim and rose up in preeminence above those who followed him. People of this spirit go out and rise up "that they might be made manifest." They want to be seen of men.

The prophet Isaiah shows us the pattern of all sin.

"How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: `I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.' Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, To the lowest depths of the Pit. (Isaiah 14:12-14, NKJV).

It is no coincidence that Isaiah starts out this prophesy against Babylon and ends up speaking of Lucifer. It is no coincidence that Jesus refers to the apostate church in the book of Revelation as Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots. If you take the Church of Jesus and fashion it after yourself, seeking the preeminence, it is not only antichrist and satanic, but is spiritual harlotry. Those who love the preeminence make the bride into a whore by seducing her with the philosophies of men.

Oh my brothers and sisters, can't you see that God is a jealous God and that He will have no other gods before Him? Can't you see that seeking preeminence over the body of Christ makes us enemies of Christ and His body? For over 1900 years men have been drunk with power in the Church, like the harlot in Revelation who is drunk on the blood of the saints (Rev. 17:6). Is it any wonder that today the Spirit of Christ is crying out with a loud voice, "Come out of her my people... least you partake of her plagues"?

Yes, all this emphasis on apostles and prophets rising up is not of Christ any more than the focus on pastors and priests has been for the past 1700 years. True leaders in the

Church don't rise up. Like John the Baptist, they decrease so that Christ might be all in all. Don't you see why Paul was driven to go to Jerusalem towards the end of his ministry, knowing full well that it is Jerusalem that kills the prophets? For the sake of the Church, he had to decrease and die so that the Church would be connected to the only Head, Jesus, and not to him.

No true leaders in the Church draw attention to themselves. They try to draw all attention to Jesus only. They always leave the flock before it starts relating to them as the head of Christ's body. They know that if they stay behind to "protect the flock," they themselves become the "ravenous wolf" they try to guard against. If given a chance, men will always focus on other men who have abilities and gifts and not on Christ.

This is what Jesus warned the apostles about when he said,

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves." (Matthew 7:15, NKJV).

And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, I am the Christ, and will deceive many." (Matthew 24:4-5, NKJV).

Note that Jesus did not say that the deceivers would claim to be the Christ, but that HE, Jesus, is the Christ and would deceive many. They have and will use the teachings of Jesus to gain control over the Church. He went on to warn,

"Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many." (Matthew 24:11, NKJV).

"For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand." (Matthew 24:24-25, NKJV).

Yes, there are many false christs and false anointings manifest in the Church today, deceiving the elect of God. It is time to wake up! Did not Jesus say, "Pray that you be found not sleeping" when He returns?

Considers Paul's warnings to the Church.

As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with

thanksgiving. Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. (Colossians 2:6-10, NKJV).

We are not made complete in apostles and prophets! We are "complete in Him!"

What is "the tradition of men" that Paul is warning about? What are "the basic principles of the world"? I believe they are the satanic form of leadership, a.k.a., "top down management." Satan sits on the mount of the congregation. Satan exalts himself over everyone under his influence. We see this model in every institution made by men. Satan is not a servant. He is never the enigma portrayed by the suffering Messiah. His followers do not have the wounds and marks of an apostle who follows Christ even to the death of the cross.

"The traditions of men, according to the principles of the world" are modeled after the system of the Prince of this world. These men "cheat you through philosophy," so they can be your leaders. They lead you away from Christ and to themselves. They draw attention to themselves and cheat you out of your inheritance IN CHRIST. The "basic principles of this world" are the satanic rule of men over men. The heavenly principle is Christ, the Head of the Church, the One who leads by weakness, not soulish power.

Yes, true apostles and prophets are one in Christ. They become one with the Foundation of the Church, Jesus Christ. Only in the loss of their own individuality are they part of the Foundation. There is no boasting and self exaltation in these men. If they would boast, it is like Paul who said,

Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation? If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity. (2 Corinthians 11:29-30, NKJV).

Remember the principle of the kingdom of God is Christ Jesus, not men.

Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their own craftiness"; and again,

"The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile." Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours: whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come--all are yours. And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's. (1 Corinthians 3:18-23, NKJV).

There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. (1 Corinthians 12:4-6, NKJV).

May the Spirit of God enlighten your understanding of the totality of Christ, so that your focus is fixed on Him and Him alone. Amen. Even so Lord Jesus, come and be ALL in us.