
BIBLE TALK

This week the question is: **What does the Bible teach about church succession?**

There are several churches claiming they are the original and true church because they claim to be able to trace their origins all the way thru history to the first century. For example, **the Catholic Church** and **the Orthodox Church** both claim that they are the right church, the only church and the original church because they both claim an unbroken chain of succession back to the days of Christ and His apostles. How should we view such claims and what does the Bible say about this? This is a very interesting question.

APOSTASY

First, the Bible itself predicted that, in time, men would corrupt the original church and fall away from the divine pattern given in the scriptures. Notice the following passages:

Acts 20:29-30

29 "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.

30 "Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-4

1 Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you,

2 not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come.

3 Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition,

4 who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

1 Timothy 4:1-3

- 1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,
- 2 speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron,
- 3 forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

These passages make it clear that an apostate (or corrupted) church would grow out of the true church. Therefore, any church which traces its origin back to the days of the apostles – if they should succeed – might only prove themselves to be a corrupted church which the scriptures predicted.

THE SEED OF THE KINGDOM

What we need to be concerned about, rather than church succession, is whether or not we are sowing the same seed which the apostles sowed. In the parable of the sower, Jesus said this:

Luke 8:11

11 "Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.

If we sow the same seed the apostles sowed, the same church will spring forth as they were planting:

Galatians 6:7

7 ... whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.

To illustrate this principle, let's suppose for a moment that all the growing wheat in all the world were destroyed. Even though all the growing wheat would cease to exist, wheat would still exist in the form of seed. The seed could be planted and another crop would spring forth. The new crop would be identical to the old crop because seeds produce after their kind (Gen 1:11).

In like manner, if all the congregations of the Lord's original church were to be destroyed, the Lord's original, true church would still exist in the form of seed. The seed which produces the Lord's original church is the word of God. If the word of God is preached, believed and obeyed, the resulting church would not be a different church than the original one. It would, in fact, be simply the original church of Jesus Christ. Jesus said:

Mark 13:31

31 "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

By sowing the identical seed in any community we may plant a congregation of disciples, identical in every respect to the original. The church of Christ had its origin in Jerusalem, but the same church can be founded in any city or community by preaching the same gospel. A few years after the Lord's church had its origin in Jerusalem, Paul went to Corinth and planted it there. He said:

1 Corinthians 3:6

6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.

The same institution that was planted in Corinth can be planted in any section of the earth at any time, provided man is careful to plant the same seed. So ... church succession is not the important thing, but rather following the written word of God is what matters.

1 Corinthians 7:19

19 Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

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