

The DNA of the Church

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Pastor E. Keith Hassell

Matthew 16:18 (NKJV) *“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”*

Matthew 18:20 (NKJV) *“For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”*

Jesus said that He would build His Church. Yet Jesus did not stay in any geographical location long enough to build a building. Some have speculated that Jesus did not begin building His Church until Pentecost. Could it be that we missed something? Was Jesus actively laying the foundation for His Church during His earthly ministry?

Jesus did not come to build a “holy place” on earth. Jesus did not come to build tabernacles, temples, cathedrals, edifices, or shrines. This was vividly illustrated in the account of the Transfiguration of Christ in Matthew 17:1-8. Upon seeing the glorious transfiguration of Jesus standing with Moses and Elijah on the mountaintop, Peter said, *“Lord, it is good for us to be here!”* In his rash foolishness to speak, Peter suggested building three tabernacles on the mountain, one for Moses, one for Elijah, and one for Jesus. His foolish words were rebuked The Father spoke from heaven declaring, *“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!”* Peter, James, and John were stricken with fear and fell on their faces. When Jesus touched them, they looked up and saw Jesus only.

Although the disciples had seen Jesus in His heavenly glory, they were not to build a tabernacle, temple, or shrine on the mountaintop. Mountains represent God’s transcendence. He is “God High and Holy”. From this mountaintop, Jesus again descended into the valley of human need. In His Incarnation, Jesus did not remain in heaven but descended into the valley of human depravity to save mankind. Jesus became immanent—“God with us—God meek and lowly”. It is not in His transcendence but in His immanence that God reaches down to the deepest levels of human need.

God rejected a tabernacle for Moses. Moses represents the voice of the Law. God rejected a tabernacle for Elijah. Elijah represents the voice of the prophets. Together Moses and Elijah represent the witness of the Law and the Prophets in the Old Testament.

Even more amazingly, God rejected a tabernacle for Jesus. Jesus needed no earthly tabernacle for His tabernacle is in heaven. Jesus did not come to reside in a building. He came to reside in the hearts of men. He did not come to dwell in a “holy place” but to dwell in a “holy people”.

So, the question must be asked, “What is the Church?” If our paradigm of the Church is wrong, then our understanding of the Church will be wrong. We will accept as normal what is abnormal. We will accept as legitimate what is illegitimate. We will accept a blueprint for building that Christ has not authorized. If this is the case, then what we are building is all in vain. It will come to nothing: *“Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.”*¹

For instance, the Church may be organized, but it is not an organization. The Church may meet in a building, but it is not a building. The Church is a living spiritual organism called the “Body of Christ”.

The human body is made up of cells. Cells are the building blocks of life. The cell has been referred to as God’s “universe within”. A cell can be as small as one 250,000th of an inch in diameter or as large as an ostrich egg. Cells are as diverse as those of a flower, of a fish, an animal, a bird, an insect, a human being, or a giant redwood tree. Regardless of this diversity, each cell contains the foundational elements for life. Every cell has an outer wall that makes it a self-contained unit of life. Within this outer wall is a semi-fluid material in which the activities within the cell take place. At the heart of the cell is the control center called the “nucleus”. Within this nucleus contains the hereditary or genetic material that enables the survival of its “kind”.²

¹ Psalm 127:1 (NKJV)

² Genesis 1:11, 12, 21, 24, 25

The nucleus contains a chemically coiled strand called DNA (*deoxyribonucleic acid*). DNA is the blueprint that provides the cell with the information it needs to develop and grow. DNA is the biological computer that holds the mapping system of life. It is often portrayed as a continuous spiral ladder.

In their book, *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*, Paul Brand and Philip Yancey describe how DNA works in the human body. Once the egg and sperm share their inheritance, the DNA chemical ladder splits down the center of every gene like the teeth of a zipper pull apart. DNA re-forms itself each time the cell divides – each cell having the identical DNA. Along the way, cells specialize, yet each cell carries the entire instruction manual of one hundred thousand genes. Your DNA contains instructions that if written out, would fill a thousand volumes, with each volume 600 pages long. A nerve cell may specialize according to information from volume four while a kidney cell may function according to information from volume 25, but here's the staggering discovery; all of the information of the entire library are carried within each cell. Not evolving and adapting—but immediately springing into existence, containing all the information. The DNA is so compacted that all the genes in your body's cells could fit into an ice cube; however, if the DNA were unwound and joined together end to end, the strand could stretch from the earth to the sun and back again – more than 400 times.³

In addition to DNA, the cell also contains RNA (*ribonucleic acid*). RNA is the chemical material that acts as a messenger to deliver DNA information beyond the nucleus. RNA activates and collects new materials that eventually become part of the cell multiplication process.

Healthy cells are the result of a correct communication between the DNA and the RNA. Cancer cells occur when a damaged gene within the DNA no longer responds to correct messaging in the division process. Some cancer cells divide according to messaging outside of the cell. Others do not respond to the “stop” signal within the cell resulting in the over-multiplication and piling up of damaged cells as with tumors or growths. Still others divide prematurely before receiving the “all clear” signal. These abnormal cells do not contain the complete DNA information of healthy cells.

How does this apply to the Church? The Church is the “Body of Christ”. As mentioned earlier, Jesus did not spend three and one-half years of His earthly ministry building a temple or establishing an organization. In John 2:19-21, Jesus referred to His body as the temple.

The Body of Christ is like a “cell” that contains both spiritual DNA and RNA. Jesus lived to establish Himself as the DNA within His Body, the Church. The DNA of the Church is “Christ in the Midst”. The DNA includes His life, nature, headship, teaching, power, etc. Jesus taught and trained disciples to be the RNA messengers to accurately communicate, replicate, and multiply the DNA of Christ in every new “cell” or “local church” that formed. The RNA “messengers” of the DNA are members within the Christian community or Church. Churches are to reproduce according to the model of “Christ in the Midst”. A local church may have many structures in place but if it is missing the DNA of “Christ in the Midst”, it has become a cancerous cell and will be rejected: *“I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; ³ and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. ⁴ Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.”*

Is Jesus Christ the DNA of your life? Are you becoming more like Jesus? As RNA, are you correctly communicating the DNA of Jesus to others or have you become a cancer cell that needs to repent and be restored to health? Will we acknowledge and practice the presence of Jesus “in our midst”? If Jesus Christ is not the DNA of the Church, if He is not “in the midst”, then it is not the Church Jesus came to build.

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³ Paul Brand and Philip Yancey, *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made* (Zondervan, 1980), p. 45-46

⁴ Revelation 2:2-4 (NKJV)