

Scofield's Untrue "Church" By S. E. Anderson

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The New Scofield Reference Bible speaks of a "true" church as distinguished from visible and local churches. It also insists that the Holy Spirit "formed" the church on the Day of Pentecost, fifty days after Christ's resurrection, but

I. Christ Built His Church, as He said. "I will build my church" (Mt. 16:18).

A church is an assembly, or congregation, of baptized believers who work and meet together in order to worship and obey the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. She can exist without her own separate edifice, or building.

The church which Christ built was not built in a day. It was a process rather than an event. It consisted of individuals who were saved, baptized, and taught to obey Christ who called them to Himself. She was a group of believers called out from the world and united with Christ as leader.

The church, as the body of Christ, would do the same kind of work that Christ did teaching, preaching, and healing (Mt. 4:23).

The twelve disciples, with Christ as their Head, Leader, and Shepherd (poimen, pastor, Jn. 10:11, 14), did real church work in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. They preached the gospel, baptized converts and taught them, and healed the sick. They cast out demons, comforted the sorrowing, and ministered to people's needs, even as true and real churches do now.

The membership list of the first church Christ built is emphasized by being recorded four times:

Matthew 10:2-4; 1 Mark. 3:14-19; Luke 6:13-16; Acts 1:13. The Twelve were the foundation of the first church (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph 2:20), placed in the church by Christ, the chief cornerstone (Jn. 15:16).

"I will build" (oEkodomeso) is future tense. Christ is still building His churches. Acts 9:31 tells of churches in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria which were still being built, or edified (oikodomoumene). The same word for "building" is used of the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 14:3, 5, 12, 26). The Corinthian church needed continuous building, as all churches do. The church at Ephesus likewise was continually being built (Eph. 4:12, 16, 29). Those churches had started long before, but their building continued.

Parents say, "We are going to build Johnny's health." A pastor says of his new charge, "I am going to build a mission giving church." A lawyer says, "I will build a good case." All those mean that they will continue to build what they had previously started. So with Christ in Matthew 16:18.

The four Gospels reveal that Christian believers, before Pentecost, had the soul saving gospel; converts were baptized and had the Lord's Supper; they were instructed in church truths, obeying Christ, being ordained by Him, and were organized enough for their needs. They had programs for evangelism, missions, teaching, healing, and counseling; they had divine power to heal the sick and to raise the dead; they had the Holy Spirit; they had prayer and business meetings; they were "added unto," and they had Christ as their Head. The first New Testament church was very much alive.

An amateur taxidermist saw an owl in a barber shop. "Look at that owl," he said; "its eyes are off color; its neck is too short; its feet are crooked; whoever stuffed ..." Then the owl turned its head and winked at the barber!

Even so today, many are parroting Scofield's mistake by saying, "The church could not begin until Pentecost." It did and it started well.

No verse says the church began at Pentecost. No verse says the Holy Spirit "formed" her. Was Scofield evasive, or naive, or what, in substituting "formed" for "built"? Christ said that He Himself would build

the church. Why not believe Him? Who would trust a physician, druggist, or banker who juggled words to support a pet theory? (I have used Scofield Bibles nearly fifty years and plan to continue. Most of the notes are good, but not all.)

When Christ said, "I will build my church," He did not say it had not then been started.

II Christ was the Head of His church, as He said.

He told His disciples, "One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren ... for one is your Master, even Christ" (Mt. 23:8, 10). So, already in the Gospels, He was "head over all things to the church" (Eph. 1:22), and He was already "head of the body, the church" (Col. 1:18).

Surely the church could be as real a church with Christ the Head physically present, as with Him absent and the Holy Spirit invisibly present.

The word, "shepherd," means pastor, and Christ was the only perfect pastor any church ever had. Why refuse the best example of church our world has ever known? Why ignore the church in the four Gospels as our model? Why not believe what Christ said and did?

III Christ was in the New Testament, as He said.

"This is my blood of the new testament," He said, In Matthew 26:28.

The four Gospels are not in the Old Testament as Scofield intimated in his notes on Exodus 19:1 and Acts 2:1. Not one verse says that Pentecost began a new era or dispensation, or any change in church activities. In fact the Greek New Testament does not mention "church" in Acts until 5:11.

Scofield has far too many dubious "pivotal" passages—

Matthew 11:28; 13:3; 16:20,21; Acts 2:1—all in questionable places. Far better are these: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mk. 1:1). "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John" (Mt. 11:13). "The law and the prophets were until John" (Lk. 16:16). "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (Jn. 1:17). "That word (gospel) ... after the baptism which John preached" (Acts 10:37). "When John had first preached, before his (Christ's) coming..." (Acts 13:24).

Notice that John the Baptist did preach the New Testament, saving gospel (Lk. 1:69, 77; 3:18). The "kingdom" John preached was the same from Matthew 3:2 to Acts 28:31. Of the multitudes who received that spiritual kingdom, nearly all were Jews; yet John's gospel included Gentiles also (Jn. 1:29). John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit (Lk. 1:15); he saw multitudes converted and baptized (Mt. 3:5, 6); he was 100% Christian (Jn. 1:15; 3:30); he was fully endorsed by Christ (Lk. 7:24-30) and by the apostles (Acts 1:21); he was as much a Christian as Stephen. All that makes him the first Christian martyr. He was in the New Testament dispensation. So was Christ in the days of His flesh whatever some dispensationalists may say.

Those who argue endlessly that the Christian era did not begin until Pentecost thereby rob us of precious Christian church truth in four of the most important books in the Bible. What a loss—a needless tragedy.

IV. Christ saved sinners in the four Gospels, as He said.

Scofield's note on page 987 suggests that the four Gospels had only a group of "Jewish disciples" but that the Epistles have the "regenerate"—as though no one was regenerated in the Gospels, with the Savior there! !

One dispensationalist wrote, "If the church was started prior to the cross, it has no Savior." Incredible! Christ came to save people from their sins (Mt. 1:21). He did save multitudes (Lk. 7:47-50; 19:9, 10; 23:43; Jn. 3:16, 17; 4:1, 2; 12:47; I Tim. 1:15).

Nearly every man buys his first car, and his first house, "on time" or with a contract for future payments. The first New Testament converts, manifested by their immersion, trusted in Christ's future death and resurrection for the full payment of their salvation. Proof texts are abundant.

Some dispensationalists speak of "The rapture of the church," meaning all those saved since Pentecost. What about those saved—and who died—before Pentecost? And does any verse mention "church" in

connection with the Second Coming of Christ? All believers, including all those in the kingdom, will be caught up with Christ, even though they have failed to join a real church.

V. Christ Endorsed John the Baptist, as He said.

John was the greatest (Mt 11:11-14; Lk 7:24-30; 20:4)

John baptized Christ, witnessed by the Father and Holy Spirit (Mt. 3:13-17). What greater honor could any Christian have?

John prepared people, as the Twelve, for Christ (Jn. 1:35-45; Acts 1:21).

Scofield erred on page 1009 in saying it is the "Messiah's earthly kingdom" that the Baptist came to announce (Mt. 3:2; 11:11). Not so; he proclaimed a spiritual kingdom—the same kingdom mentioned twenty-six times after the resurrection of Christ. Why should one repent for a kingdom 2000 years away? Jesus said about the poor in spirit, "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5:3). He also told us to seek the kingdom now (Mt. 6:33). He said the kingdom had already come (Mt. 12:28), and that it should be preached in all the world (Mt. 24:14). Paul preached it everywhere (Acts 19:8, 28:31).

Christ refused an earthly kingdom offered to Him by "a great multitude" of about 5,000 men (Jn. 6:1-15). He said His kingdom was "not of this world" (Jn. 18:36). From the first, He came to die for sins and to rise again. That act of redemption He portrayed and promised in His baptism (Mt. 3:13-17); 1 Cor. 15:1-4; 1 Pet.3:21). He never shifted from a kingdom to a cross, as Scofield indicated (pg. 1021).

The kingdom preached from Matthew 3:2 to Acts 28:31 was the spiritual realm with Christ as King. Every saved person, obeying Christ, is in that kingdom. The repentant thief on the cross entered it then and there, The Ethiopian entered it the moment he believed, before his baptism.

That kingdom is similar to the so-called "true, invisible universal" church of Scofield. If he had stayed with his definition of "church" on page 1021 (assembly ... gathering of people), if he had let the church be the church, if he had defined the kingdom correctly—then less confusion would follow. Christ did not say, "I will build two churches."

Every saved person is in the kingdom, before and without joining a church— which he ought to join. The smaller church(es) and the larger kingdom are like concentric circles, with Christ at the center of each. The New Testament age has only one kingdom but many churches (tools of the kingdom).

Since the churches are "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets" (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 2:20; 3:5), then John the Baptist as a prophet (Lk. 7:2; 20:6) was part of the foundation of the churches). It seems that the antipathy of European theologians toward Baptists has resulted in downgrading John the Baptist. Whatever the cause, it is time we learned and followed Christ's high respect for the first Christian.

VI Christ Baptizes Believers In the Holy Spirit, as He said.

"For John truly baptized in water; but ye shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days from now," said Jesus in Acts 1:5.

The King James translators were anti-immersionists which explains their use of "with water" and "with the Holy Spirit" instead of in as in the Greek.

Six places identify Christ as our baptizer in the Spirit (Mt. 3:11; Mk. 1:8; Lk. 3:16; Jn. 1:33; Acts 1:5; 11:16). In no verse is it said that the Holy Spirit baptizes anyone.

In ten places Scofield said the Holy Spirit baptizes each believer into "the body of Christ" (pages 157, 987, 1016, 1162, 1163, 1174, 1244, 1272 1275, 1324). In each case Scofieldians are confused by the King James version of 1 Corinthians 12:13, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body ..." A better version is "For indeed we were all brought into one body by baptism, in the one spirit, whether we are Jews or Greeks

The latter version fits the facts well. It was by immersion that 3,000 converts were "added unto" the church in Acts 2:41-47. The same baptism initiated the Corinthian Christians into their church (Acts 18:8). A convert cannot rightly join a church before, or without, baptism. Baptism, with its required evidences of conversion, is the last thing one needs to do in order to become a member of a church.

In New Testament times, before the sprinkling heresy began, baptism was the pivotal step whereby converts left their old lives and entered the new fellowship of churches. Then it was not disputed, denied, or delayed; it was obeyed promptly after conversion (Acts 2:41; 8:12, 38; 9:18 10:48; 16:15, 33; 18:8). An unbaptized convert was disobedient; baptism was and is the first obligation of a new believer. Anti-immersionists minimize baptism, contrary to Scripture. The one word, “baptized,” describes the entire work of Christ and of John the Baptist in many places— John 1:25-27, 31, 33; 3:22, 23, 26; 4:1, 2; 10:40; Acts 10:37 13:24. Why? Because baptism portrays the gospel, the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15: 1-4; Rom 6:4; Col. 2:12). In the light of the above sixteen clear verses, it is easy to see water baptism in 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3, and Ephesians 4:5.

Those who reject immersion place themselves with the Pharisees and lawyers who “rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized by him” (Lk. 7:30) John’s baptism was equated with the counsel of God which means His purpose, or will. Yet some dispensationalists dare to downgrade baptism to a mere optional ritual. No wonder they refuse to recognize it in 1 Corinthians 12:13.

The one body (1 Cor. 12:13) is the one church at Corinth, for it was a body. The “body” metaphor is used for the Corinthian church eighteen times from verses 12 to 27. As a body it met regularly “on the first day of the week” (1 Cor. 5:4; 10:16,17; 11:17,18, 20, 33; 14:23, 26; 16:1, 2). An imaginary, invisible, universal church cannot meet, and never will meet. Therefore, Scofield’s “true” church cannot be a BODY, any more than bricks scattered all over a city can be a building.

The abuse and misuse of 1 Corinthians 12:13, is too much like the Mormons’ use of 15:29 in baptizing for the dead. In each case, confusing doctrine, like an inverted pyramid, is built on one obscure or difficult verse.

1 Corinthians 12:13 cannot refer to Pentecost, for neither Paul nor the Corinthians were there (4:15). Never is it said the Holy Spirit baptizes anyone. It is Christ who built His church. He baptizes believers in the Spirit.

Some dispensationalists downgrade Christ (p. 1162) by denying Him as Builder and Baptizer. They wrongly emphasize the Holy Spirit above Christ in Acts, but the names of the Father (with pronouns) in Acts number 275, of Christ 248, and of the Holy Spirit 57. The Holy Spirit inspired it that way.

VII. Christ Built Real Churches, as He said.

The only adjective used for a New Testament church in this age is the one Christ used — “I will build my church.” That makes it a new, true church. The one He led, doing real church work in Palestine, was a true church. So was each of the churches in “all Judea and Galilee and Samaria” (Acts 9:31), many of which could well have been started when Christ’s first church won converts in many localities, baptized them and taught them, all before Pentecost. Why not? Would a missionary now leave his converts without organizing them for continued work and worship? No, nor would Christ— or Paul.

Scofield imagined an invisible, universal, non-assembling, and hence non-functioning, non-company of believers to be “the true church” (pp. 1162, 1299, 1324). Then, are visible churches not true churches/ (We know that a church may have unsaved members in her — look at Judas, but she can still be a real church. Scofield referred to his “true church” in thirty-eight New Testament passages.)

The emphasis on an imaginary “church” gives comfort to irresponsible, lazy and useless Christians who refuse to join and support real churches. Their excuse: “we belong to the true church.” Such a foggy “church” is poor defense against heresies and cults; it is poor help to underpaid pastors and missionaries; it pays no utility or janitor bills; it builds no churches or parsonages; it supports no hospitals or orphanages. What does it do?

Scofield’s “true” church has no meeting place, meeting, pastor, deacon, treasurer, clerk discipline, baptism, Lord’s Supper, choir, commission, responsibility, Sunday School or conference. So, is it true? Why should anyone disembodied the church(es) Christ built? Is that treating Him fairly? Christ loved the church —of visible, imperfect people like us. He wants us to have vigorous churches. But some dispensationalists emphasize an imaginary church, though some of them may belong to real churches.

Real, visible churches are the only organizations Christ left to do all His work, in all the world, in all the centuries. Why, then, weaken His ministry by exalting an imaginary, helpless thing over real churches? When we cheapen the real bodies of Christ, we cheapen the Head of those bodies.

The word “church” is sometimes used in a generic, or institutional sense, meaning all real churches. Christ used the word “church” twenty-three times, of which twenty-two meant local, visible, real churches. In Matthew 16:18 His use of “church” can mean all real churches. In Ephesians and Colossians the singular form stands for all real churches, just as a dozen other singular nouns in those books stand for all separate items so named.

Utterly impossible and meaningless, with Scofield’s misuse of “true,” are the metaphors for “church,” such as, body, building, candlestick, flock, pillar, and house. Each one has to be local, visible, tangible, and real to make sense. As for “bride,” one that is visible is preferred by most men. When we all get to heaven all real churches will be one bride—and visible. In the meantime, Christ can be the Head of each church, as He is of each man (I Cor. 11:3).

Is the church an organism? No, for an organism is a single living thing such as a bug, a bird, or a beast. An organization is a systematized group of organisms; so a church is an organized group of Christians. A dictionary should settle the matter, but the word, “church,” has been mangled so badly by heresies that a dictionary offers sixteen different definitions!

Let us show proper respect to vital membership in real gospel churches. That is Christ’s plan. We have no obligation to an “invisible” church.

In spite of some foggy dispensational distortions of New Testament church truth, each Christian is duty bound to support his nearby gospel church, trying always to build her up in faith and works. That is the New Testament plan. There is no plan to build an imaginary invisible phantom.

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