**WHAT DID GOD “ESTABLISH”?**

World scholars seem to agree that the church was established in Jerusalem, the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ. Acts 2 gives the record, and only a few with some creed to defend offer objection. But **WHAT was established when the church was established**? Foolish question? Well, read Acts 2 carefully…

Any "dedication" services? "Chairman" appointed? Any of the "institutional" procedures one would expect if today's common conception of "church" were correct? It just isn't there. Today the emphasis is upon the party – the church is something like a lodge, or "Royal Order of Saints" – a society, somehow related to certain buildings. This conception is missing in God's record of establishment.

Prophecies concerning the establishment of the church invariably refer to the relationship, or the basis for the relationship, between God and individuals. Isaiah says, "the mountain of Jehovah's house shall be established on the top of the mountains" **– referring to** **the establishment of God's law for all nations** (Isa.2:1-f). The promised kingdom was a promise of peace according to divine government (Isa.9:1-f). The ransomed of Jehovah would walk in "The Way of Holiness" (Isa.35:8-f).

***Little Red Wagon:***It seems many think of the church as something like a little red wagon. "Established on Pentecost," it stood ready to roll, and people could jump in and ride to heaven. But somewhere along the line, a side-rail broke, an axle was bent, the tongue came loose, and finally a wheel fell away. Luther tried to put the wheel back on, but further bent the axle in his effort. Others replaced the tongue with a new but different instrument – unsuited to the purpose and function of the original tongue. Alas, the church was broken down and out of service.

Then Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone determined to restore the church. They straightened the axle, replaced the tongue with an original model, repaired the side-rail, and put the wheel back in place. Now people could again ride home to heaven.

Have I stretched the picture? Perhaps – but only to emphasize what I believe to be an entirely erroneous conception of the church established on Pentecost. This is a denominational concept. It glorifies the "party" and does not properly distinguish between faithful and unfaithful people.

***WHO are The Church??***The word "church" is a collective noun, and it "collects" people. But not just any people. Christ's church consists of "saints and faithful brethren," "a people for God's own possession" (Col.1:2; 1 Pet.2:9). Of all the multitude gathered in Jerusalem, only those who "gladly received his word" and "were baptized" became members of the church (Acts 2:41).

Members of the church do sin, but they are expected to repent and pray God for forgiveness. Failing to do this, they are denied the fellowship of Christians (1Cor.5). A congregation of Christians who, collectively, no longer act in keeping with God's will is unworthy of a name and place among the churches of Christ (Rev.2). **The Lord**'**s church consists of people identified with the TRUTH – not just a people identified with a party**.

***God's Establishment Unchanged:***What God established – truth – the New Covenant – never changes (1Pet.1:23-f). But the party – the people – could fall away (1Tim.4:1-f). First their attitude toward divine authority is altered, then their practices; then, usually many years later, their terminology. Because the **rule** is one thing, and the **people** who supposedly follow the rule is another, Paul said we must not measure ourselves by ourselves (2Cor.10:12-f).

One may "stay with the building," "stay with the preacher," "stay with the elders," "stay with 90% of the people" –**and yet leave the church which God established**. In fact, this is precisely the history of denominationalism with its creed-bound people.

Christians today need to restudy their conception of Christ's church. We must rededicate ourselves, not to some "party" but to the Christ, and to His cause. I must know the truth, and obey it, regardless of the action of others – "in the church" or out of it. I must remember that it is the purified and cleansed church – not the "party" – that Christ promises to save eternally (Eph.5:26-27). What God really established is firm and sure, and cannot be shaken (Heb.10:28).

--Robert F. Turner