



Retired Pastor  
& Professor

**Sermon Brief**  
**Text: Matthew 16:13-19**  
**Title: A Fellowship of Sinners**  
Lorin L. Cranford

Seeking to faithfully proclaim the whole council of God in scripture!



**INTRODUCTION**

**What is the church?** The dictionary gives five different definitions of the English word: 1) building, 2) clergy or officialdom of religious body, 3) whole denomination of Christians and a congregation, 4) public worship, and 5) the clerical profession.<sup>1</sup> The word serves as a noun, an adjective, and a verb. The English word has its origin in the middle English *chirche* which comes from the Old English *cirice*. It has been around since before the twelfth century.<sup>2</sup> But what does ‘church’ mean?



In Matthew 16:18, Jesus used the term ἐκκλησία which is translated ‘church’ in most English Bibles. What the Lord said about ‘church’ is an important starting point for biblical understanding. Turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew 16:13-19.

13 Ἐλθὼν δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἰς τὰ μέρη Καισαρείας τῆς Φιλίππου ἠρώτα τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ λέγων· Τίνα λέγουσιν οἱ ἄνθρωποι εἶναι τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου; 14 οἱ δὲ εἶπαν· Οἱ μὲν Ἰωάννην τὸν βαπτιστὴν, ἄλλοι δὲ Ἡλίαν, ἕτεροι δὲ Ἰερεμίαν ἢ ἓνα τῶν προφητῶν. 15 λέγει αὐτοῖς· Ὑμεῖς δὲ τίνα με λέγετε εἶναι; 16 ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ Σίμων Πέτρος εἶπεν· Σὺ εἶ ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος. 17 ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτῷ· Μακάριος εἶ, Σίμων Βαριωνᾶ, ὅτι σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα οὐκ ἀπεκάλυψέν σοι ἀλλ’ ὁ πατήρ μου ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς· 18 **κἀγὼ δέ σοι λέγω ὅτι σὺ εἶ Πέτρος, καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ πέτρᾳ οἰκοδομήσω μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, καὶ πύλαι ᾄδου οὐ κατισχύσουσιν αὐτῆς·** 19 δώσω σοι τὰς κλεῖδας τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν, καὶ ὃ ἐὰν δήσῃς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἔσται δεδεμένον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, καὶ ὃ ἐὰν λύσῃς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἔσται λελυμένον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.<sup>3</sup>

The richness of the concept of church in the New Testament is much too extensive for us to explore in a single sermon. Our pastor has just completed a series of sermons defining aspects of church life based on our church confession of faith and the scriptures. But even this sermon series just touched the tip of the iceberg in what the New Testament has to say about church.

I want today to highlight the statement of Jesus found in verse eighteen and explore the implications of this short statement regarding the idea of church. It contains some profound insights that can encourage us in our church life. When Jesus said in Matthew’s translation of Aramaic into ancient Greek, οἰκοδομήσω μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, He uttered a mouthful of understanding about church. And we need to understand this.



**BODY**

In this statement in verse eighteen at least two basic ideas emerge: the building of a church and who is going to build it. Let’s look at these two aspects.

<sup>1</sup>“1: a building for public and especially Christian worship; 2: the clergy or officialdom of a religious body; 3 often capitalized : a body or organization of religious believers: as a: the whole body of Christians, b: denomination <the Presbyterian church>, c: congregation; 4: a public divine worship <goes to church every Sunday>; 5: the clerical profession <considered the church as a possible career>. [“Church,” *Merriam-Webster.com*]

<sup>2</sup>“Middle English *chirche* < Old English *cirice*, from West Germanic *kirika*, from Ancient Greek κυριακόν (*kyriakon*), neuter form of κυριακός (‘belonging to the lord’) from κύριος (*kyrios*, ‘ruler, lord’). For vowel evolution, see bury. Greek κυριακόν (*kyriakon*) was used of houses of Christian worship since circa 300 AD, especially in the East, though it was less common in this sense than ἐκκλησία (*ekklēsia*, ‘congregation’) or βασιλική (*basilikē*, ‘royal thing’). An example of the direct Greek-to-Germanic progress of many Christian words, via the Goths; it was probably used by West Germanic people in their pre-Christian period. Cognate with West Frisian *tsjerke*, Dutch *kerk*, German *Kirche*, Danish *kirke*, Swedish *kyrka*, Norwegian *kirke* or *kyrkje*, and Icelandic *kirkja*. Also picked up by Slavic, via Old High German *chirihha* (compare Old Church Slavonic црѣкѣ (*crĕky*), Russian церковь (*cérkov’*)). Romance and Celtic languages use variants of Latin *ecclesia*.” [“Church,” *Wikipedia.org*]

<sup>3</sup>**Matthew 16:13** Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” 14 And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” 15 He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” 16 Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” 17 And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. 18 **And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.** 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” 20 Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

## I. The Building, *οικοδομήσω μου την ἐκκλησίαν*

When Jesus told the disciples, “I will build my church,” He wasn’t talking about a building made of bricks and mortar. The term, here translated as ‘church,’ ἐκκλησία was a people word in New Testament usage and referred to a gathering of people for religious objectives. Not until many centuries later did the word ἐκκλησία expand its meaning to include a place of meeting for believers as a religious assembly. Thus Jesus’ words here specifically promise the building of groups of people who would come together to worship and carry out the desires of Christ. They would be located in many different places, but always the focus was on the assembling of a group of people for worship and service. People, not buildings, make up the church that Jesus promises to build.

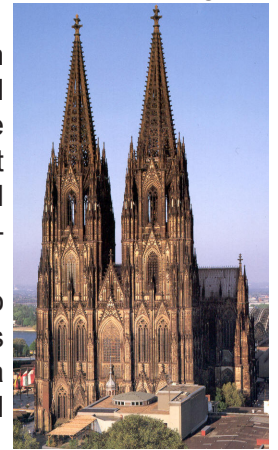
### 1. The Process, *οικοδομήσω*

In the verb *οικοδομήσω*, “I will build,” comes important insight about the nature of church. The Greek verb stresses a construction process that continues on for a lengthy period of time. The implication of the use of this verb is simply this: Jesus promised to begin building His church with the disciples, but that construction process would continue unfinished until He returns to claim the church as His bride at the end of human history.



For the disciples in the first century, such a concept was easy to grasp. Herod the Great began a remodeling of the Jerusalem temple soon after coming to power just before the beginning of the Christian era. Remodeling work was still taking place up to the time of the destruction of the temple by the Romans in 70 AD. Every time they went to the temple to worship during their entire life, the sound of workers doing the remodeling and expansion work could be heard.

If you have ever traveled in Europe and visited any of the large cathedrals, you can understand what they knew. Even though many of these church buildings have existed for hundreds of years, work is constantly being done on them. The cathedral in Cologne where we lived is one of the largest and was begun in 1248 AD. But a whole department of church organization is devoted to perpetual working on the physical building; several individuals will spend their entire adult life doing nothing but working on the church building.



But the church that Jesus is building has been under construction for almost two thousand years and still is not finished! And it won’t be completed until Christ comes again at the end of the ages! This is not some quickie job going on here. Rather, it’s a carefully thought out, meticulously detailed construction project that Christ is committed to doing.

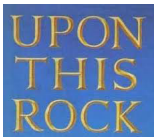
### 2. The Materials,

For a building that is taking so long to build, the nature question is “Lord, what kind of construction material are You using for this project?” The Lord’s answer in our text is not only surprising, but shocking.

#### a) Peter, Matt. 16:18a, *σὺ εἶ Πέτρος, καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ πέτρᾳ*

*You are Peter, and upon this rock....*

In the first part of verse eighteen Jesus said, *κἀγὼ δὲ σοὶ λέγω ὅτι σὺ εἶ Πέτρος, καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ πέτρᾳ οἰκοδομήσω μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν*, “And I say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church.” Peter had just made the confession of a lifetime to Jesus: *Σὺ εἶ ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος*, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (v. 16). Although the phrase *σὺ εἶ Πέτρος, καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ πέτρᾳ οἰκοδομήσω μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν* has been variously interpreted over the centuries, the most natural meaning of the word play on rock, Πέτρος and πέτρα, is simply that Christ declares He is going to build His church out of folks like Peter, that is, those who make the confession of faith that Peter had just made.



That sounds nice until we stop for a moment to look at Peter’s life in the pages of the New Testament. He was a Galilean fisherman with just the basic training in Judaism that every Jewish boy would have received. He wasn’t trained as a scribe or religious expert. His Aramaic wasn’t that good, for he had a heavy Galilean accent when he spoke his mother tongue.<sup>4</sup> But more importantly the picture that emerges inside the gospels is one of an impetuous man who suffered greatly from ‘foot in the mouth’ disease. Peter’s high and low

<sup>4</sup>Matthew 26:69-73. 69 Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant-girl came to him and said, “You also were with Jesus the Galilean.” 70 But he denied it before all of them, saying, “I do not know what you are talking about.” 71 When he went out to the porch, another servant-girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.” 72 Again he denied it with an oath, “I do not know the man.” 73 After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, “Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you.”

points in the gospels' account comes back to back. In Matthew 16:16, he makes the great confession of his life about Christ. Yet not long after this session with the disciples had finished, Jesus will say to him, “Ὑπαγε ὀπίσω μου, Σατανᾶ· σκάνδαλον εἶ ἐμοῦ, ὅτι οὐ φρονεῖς τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ ἀλλὰ τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, “*Get behind me, Satan, you are offensive to me, because you are setting your mind not on the things of God, but on those of men*” (v. 23). Not many months later Peter would adamantly deny that he knew Christ in the courtyard of the high priest (cf. Matt. 26:69-73). Peter could easily move between highs and lows in his commitment to Christ.

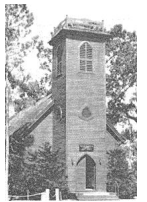
Now this is not grade A prime lumber that the Lord is using to build His church! Rather, it's closer to fire sale, bargain basement low grade lumber!

**b) *Corinthians, 1 Cor. 3:9*, θεοῦ γάρ ἐσμεν συνεργοί· θεοῦ γεώργιον, *θεοῦ οἰκοδομή ἐστε.*  
For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, *you are God's building.***

Do we have indications of this kind of material being used for the building of the church elsewhere in the New Testament?

The answer is yes, we do. When Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, he used the noun form of the verb used in Matthew 16:18. About the Corinthians, Paul said, θεοῦ οἰκοδομή ἐστε, (“*you are God's building*”). What? The church at Corinth God's building? Here was a collection of house church groups of believers that were saturated with problems of all kinds and stripes. They were divided and fussing over different preachers (chap. one); they were so worldly that Paul could hardly use religious language in writing to them (chap. three); one member of one of the house church groups was living in open immorality with his birth mother, and the community was bragging about the superior spirituality that this represented (chap. five); some members were suing other members in the court system (chap. six); some of the married men were still going to brothels after becoming Christians (chap. six); the observing of the Lord's Supper was filled with discrimination by the rich against the poor (chap. 11); and some members were questioning whether Jesus had actually been raised from the dead (chap. 15). How could such a group of people be God's building?

And yet Paul says to these people: “*You are God's building.*” Now this is clearly not top grade construction material for the building of the church! This church was dysfunctional from top to bottom. And it had more problems than a dog has fleas! But yet the apostle Paul can label them God's building under construction. That's not a picture of the little idyllic church out in the country with a lovely building where perfect people gather every Sunday to worship and serve God, as the old hymn “*Little Brown Church in the Vale*” depicts. There's something very important for us to learn here about church.



**c) *Persecuted believers, 1 Pet. 2:5*, καὶ αὐτοὶ ὡς λίθοι ζῶντες οἰκοδομεῖσθε οἶκος πνευματικὸς εἰς ἱεράτευμα ἅγιον, ἀνενέγκαι πνευματικὰς θυσίας εὐπροσδέκτους θεῷ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ·**

**And *you are yourselves being built as living stones into a spiritual house* for a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices that are well pleasing to God through Jesus Christ**

Many years after Christ made this astounding declaration to Peter that He was going to build His church out of folks like him, Peter passed along that same idea to Christian churches scattered all over most of what is now modern Turkey. Writing to believers he labeled as divinely chosen exiles (ἐκλεκτοῖς παρεπιδήμοις) in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (1 Pet. 1:1), he said of them (2:5), καὶ αὐτοὶ ὡς λίθοι ζῶντες οἰκοδομεῖσθε οἶκος πνευματικὸς εἰς ἱεράτευμα ἅγιον, ἀνενέγκαι πνευματικὰς θυσίας εὐπροσδέκτους θεῷ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (“*And you are yourselves being built as living stones into a spiritual house...*”). These people, Gentiles and Jews from many different ethnic backgrounds, languages, etc. who were being persecuted as criminals and worthless by local governments, friends, neighbors etc. Peter calls a spiritual temple for God to dwell in, using the same Greek verb used in Matt. 16:18. The world around these people considered them as scum and worthless. Peter says, however, God considered them valuable construction material to be incorporated into His house on earth, the church.

Wow! Again, not top notch construction material being used here humanly speaking.

### **3. *The Lessons***

What can we learn from these three references by Jesus, Paul, and Peter? A lot! I want to stress only three important lessons from the picture that emerges here.

**a) *Patience,***

From Peter's life story in the New Testament, we can learn patience. Patience from the perspective of the Lord's dealings with us. When you look at the portrait of Peter in the pages of the New Testament, an amazing story emerges.

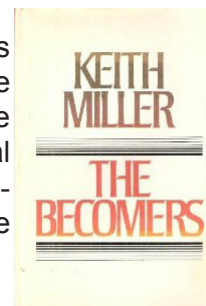


Peter grew up as a fisherman's son near the Sea of Galilee in northern Palestine. This meant ordinary synagogue based education as a Jewish boy along with learning the trade of his father. When Christ called Peter to follow Him (Mt. 4:18-22), Peter's life took on a new direction he could never have anticipated. The episode of our text in Matthew 16 comes toward the end of Jesus' public ministry in Galilee and reflects a great moment of confession, Σὺ εἶ ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος (v. 16), and also one of the lowest points in Peter's life with Jesus' rebuke of him, παγε ὀπίσω μου, Σατανᾶ· σκάνδαλον εἶ ἐμοῦ (v. 23).<sup>5</sup> When Jesus needed his support very greatly, Peter thought sleep more important than prayer in the Garden of Olives on the night of Jesus' arrest.<sup>6</sup> Another horrible failure for Peter came at Jesus' arrest. In the courtyard of the high priest in Jerusalem, Peter adamantly denies ever having known Christ, just as Jesus had earlier predicted he would.<sup>7</sup>

Yet, when Jesus blessed Peter, Μακάριος εἶ, Σίμων Βαριωνᾶ (v. 17), in our passage, He saw in Peter potential and a life worth saving and using in the Kingdom of God. And despite the failures and weaknesses, Jesus didn't give up on Peter. He patiently pushed Peter toward the greatness that this fisherman would eventually achieve. One of the Lord's last recorded earthly conversations with Peter comes in John 21, where Christ challenges Peter to become the spiritual leader Christ wanted him to be.<sup>8</sup>

Then in the book of Acts, Peter assumes the leadership role of the Christian movement at Jerusalem. He stands as a powerful preacher of the gospel on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), and as leader both of the Apostles (Acts 15) and of the beginning Jewish phase of Christianity (chaps 1-11). Two letters are attributed to him in the canon of the New Testament reflecting profound spiritual insight toward the end of his earthly life.

What does this tell us? Jesus has amazing patience with us and desires to work with us to develop our spiritual potential. The church is made up of "becomers," to use the phrase of Keith Miller in his book of several years back. In the church that Jesus is building, no one is perfect, no one has 'arrived' at spiritual perfection. We all are on a pilgrimage of spiritual growth and development that lasts the entire spiritual journey of our life. And the Lord is patiently and persistently seeking to mold and shape us through every experience to be more productive and useful to the Kingdom.



Take heart, my friends! God is at work in your life, and He won't abandon you.

### **b) Inclusive,**

What Peter and the Twelve came gradually to realize was that God has a place of contribution for every member of the church. No matter who we are, God has gifted us for service through His church. Paul

<sup>5</sup>**Mt. 16:23**, ὁ δὲ στραφεὶς εἶπεν τῷ Πέτρῳ· Ὑπαγε ὀπίσω μου, Σατανᾶ· σκάνδαλον εἶ ἐμοῦ, ὅτι οὐ φρονεῖς τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ ἀλλὰ τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων.

And having turned Jesus said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan; you are offensive to me, because you do not set your mind on the things of God, instead, on the things of men."

<sup>6</sup>**Matt. 26:40-41**, 40 καὶ ἔρχεται πρὸς τοὺς μαθητὰς καὶ εὕρισκει αὐτοὺς καθεύδοντας, καὶ λέγει τῷ Πέτρῳ· Οὕτως οὐκ ἰσχύσατε μίαν ὥραν γρηγορῆσαι μετ' ἐμοῦ; 41 γρηγορεῖτε καὶ προσεύχεσθε, ἵνα μὴ εἰσέλθητε εἰς πειρασμόν· τὸ μὲν πνεῦμα πρόθυμον ἢ δὲ σὰρξ ἀσθενής.

40 Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? 41 Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

<sup>7</sup>**Luke 22:61-62**, καὶ στραφεὶς ὁ κύριος ἐνέβλεπεν τῷ Πέτρῳ, καὶ ὑπεμνήσθη ὁ Πέτρος τοῦ λόγου τοῦ κυρίου ὡς εἶπεν αὐτῷ ὅτι Πρὶν ἀλέκτορα φωνῆσαι σήμερον ἀπαρνήσῃ με τρίς. 62 καὶ ἐξελθὼν ἔξω ἔκλαυσεν πικρῶς.

The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times." 62 And he went out and wept bitterly.

<sup>8</sup>**John 21:15-19**, 15 Ὅτε οὖν ἠρίστησαν λέγει τῷ Σίμωνι Πέτρῳ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· Σίμων Ἰωάννου, ἀγαπᾷς με πλέον τούτων; λέγει αὐτῷ· Ναί, κύριε, σὺ οἶδας ὅτι φιλῶ σε. λέγει αὐτῷ· Βόσκει τὰ ἀρνία μου. 16 λέγει αὐτῷ πάλιν δευτέρον· Σίμων Ἰωάννου, ἀγαπᾷς με; λέγει αὐτῷ· Ναί, κύριε, σὺ οἶδας ὅτι φιλῶ σε. λέγει αὐτῷ· Ποίμαινε τὰ πρόβατά μου. 17 λέγει αὐτῷ τὸ τρίτον· Σίμων Ἰωάννου, φιλεῖς με; ἐλυπήθη ὁ Πέτρος ὅτι εἶπεν αὐτῷ τὸ τρίτον· Φιλεῖς με; καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ· Κύριε, πάντα σὺ οἶδας, σὺ γινώσκεις ὅτι φιλῶ σε. λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· Βόσκει τὰ πρόβατά μου. 18 ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω σοι, ὅτε ἦς νεώτερος, ἐζώννυες σεαυτὸν καὶ περιεπάτεις ὅπου ἤθελες· ὅταν δὲ γηράσῃς, ἐκτενεῖς τὰς χεῖράς σου, καὶ ἄλλος σε ζώσει καὶ οἴσει ὅπου οὐ θέλεις. 19 τοῦτο δὲ εἶπεν σημαίνων ποίῳ θανάτῳ δοξάσει τὸν θεόν. καὶ τοῦτο εἰπὼν λέγει αὐτῷ· Ἀκολουθεῖ μοι.

15 When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." 16 A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." 17 He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. 18 Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." 19 (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."

expressed it so very pointedly to the Corinthians with all their failures and weaknesses in 1 Cor. 12:7, ἐκάστῳ δὲ δίδοται ἡ φανέρωσις τοῦ πνεύματος πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον.<sup>9</sup> His dramatic picture of the human body in chapter twelve emphasizes a place of ministry for every member of the church. And this opportunity comes not because of who we are, not because we are talented, but because in conversion God has “gifted” (δίδοται) us through the Holy Spirit to be able to serve Christ in His church.

As a young Galilean Jewish boy fishing with his brother and father on the Sea of Galilee, no one would have imagined that this boy would become the beginning leader of the largest religious movement the world has ever seen. And if we are honest with ourselves, our own individual stories are similar to Peter’s. We have no idea what God desires to accomplish in and through our lives for the advancement of the Kingdom on earth.

And here is the encouragement from this. My friends, every one here today has significant potential for service in the church. Not because of who you are, but solely because God has “gifted” (δίδοται) you in conversion for service. Don’t try to beg off by saying, “I can’t do anything.” You are contradicting God with such a statement, for God says you can. He has called you to serve. Peter’s life should inspire and motivate each one of us!

### c) *Not Proudful,*

What Peter learned over a lifetime of serving Christ in a very prominent position of leadership he shared with others toward the end of his earthly life in 1 Pet. 5:2-3, ποιμάνετε τὸ ἐν ὑμῖν ποιμνιον τοῦ θεοῦ, ἐπισκοποῦντες μὴ ἀναγκαστῶς ἀλλὰ ἐκουσίως κατὰ θεόν, μὴδὲ αἰσχροκερδῶς ἀλλὰ προθύμως, μὴδ’ ὡς κατακυριεύοντες τῶν κλήρων ἀλλὰ τύποι γινόμενοι τοῦ ποιμνίου<sup>10</sup>

Service is a matter of humility, not of pride. Peter admonishes spiritual leaders in his letter to serve by example, not by bossing everyone around. Empty yourself of wrong motives: **compulsion** {μὴ ἀναγκαστῶς}, **not for money** {μὴδὲ αἰσχροκερδῶς}, **not bossy** {μὴδ’ ὡς κατακυριεύοντες τῶν κλήρων}. These just prevent God working through you in ministry. Instead, adopt the proper motives: **willingly** {ἐκουσίως}, **eagerly** {προθύμως}, and as **an example** {τύποι γινόμενοι τοῦ ποιμνίου}. This is the path to effective service.

It is through folks functioning as servants, not bosses, that Christ builds His church in this world. This is both the example and the teaching of Peter who found it to be central in a life time of service in the church. It did take him some time to discover this, but when he did God used him mightily. And He will do the same with you.

## II. The Builder, *οἰκοδομήσω μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν*

The second major emphasis of this short phrase is on who does the building of the church.

### 1. *Jesus’ church, not ours, μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν*

The verb used here is first person singular: **I will build**. It is Jesus who commits Himself to the building of the church. He did not say to the disciples, “You will build my church.” Instead, He took upon Himself the responsibility for building the church.

This we must understand clearly. It is not our responsibility to build the church. We are ‘stones’ that make up the church -- to use Peter’s image. Or, pieces of a body like hands, eyes, mouth etc. -- to use Paul’s image to the Corinthians. When we give ourselves over to Christ, *He uses us* in our distinctive ministries to accomplish the spiritual growth and construction of His church. But it is He who is constructing the church.

How committed is He to this work? Paul in his letter to the Ephesians provides two quick glimpses at this point.

**a) Loves it.** When Paul looks around to find something to compare the marital relation between a husband and a wife, he turns to Christ and the church as the model. In **Eph. 5:25, 29-30**, Paul asserts Christ’s sacrificial love for the church: ὁ Χριστὸς ἠγάπησεν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν καὶ ἑαυτὸν παρέδωκεν ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς,... 29 οὐδεὶς γάρ ποτε τὴν ἑαυτοῦ σάρκα ἐμίσησεν, ἀλλὰ ἐκτρέφει καὶ θάλπει αὐτήν, καθὼς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, 30 ὅτι μέλη ἐσμὲν τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ.<sup>11</sup>

Christ’s love was sacrificial, not theoretical. He gave Himself. And thereby sets an example to us for our

<sup>9</sup>And to each is given a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

<sup>10</sup>**1 Peter 5:2-3 (NRSV):** 2 tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it — not for sordid gain but eagerly. 3 Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock.

<sup>11</sup>Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it, for no one ever hates his own flesh, rather he nourishes and cares for it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body.



commitment to the church. We can serve in the church best when we love it and are willing to sacrifice ourselves in service through the church.

**b) Redeemed it.** The second point that Paul makes about Christ's commitment to the church is that He redeemed it through sacrificial commitment: **Eph. 5:25-27**, ὁ Χριστὸς ἠγάπησεν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν καὶ ἑαυτὸν παρέδωκεν ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς, 26 ἵνα αὐτὴν ἀγιάσῃ καθαρίσας τῷ λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος ἐν ῥήματι, 27 ἵνα παραστήσῃ αὐτὸς ἑαυτῷ ἕνδοξον τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, μὴ ἔχουσαν σπίλον ἢ ρυτίδα ἢ τι τῶν τοιοῦτων, ἀλλ' ἵνα ᾗ ἁγία καὶ ἄμωμος.<sup>12</sup>

Christ's loving commitment to the church was to make it a beautiful bride -- this Paul stresses in verses 25-27. Whatever Christ did for the church was intended to make it better and more praiseworthy to God. Here is our challenge. We must love the church and give it sacrificial service. But that service must make the church better and more pleasing to God. Nothing could be worse than for our service to mar its beauty before God. We aren't called to tear down or harm the church in any way.

## 2. **Master Builder, οἰκοδομήσω**

Christ then committed Himself to build His church. And He understood how to do it right. This we must never forget. He was a master builder, not making a piece of furniture in Joseph's carpenter shop any longer. But now He was committing Himself to the building of a new temple of God, the church. And this would take a lot of work and divine wisdom and skill.

### CONCLUSION

In my first pastorate in the mid 1960s in west Texas, there was a precious family in the church by the name of Luther and Angie Dye. Luther served as chairman of deacons during the four years I was pastor of the small ranching congregation in Graford, Texas. For most of his career, Luther had been postmaster in the post office there. Along the way though, he had acquired master carpenter level skills in wood working on the side. And in his retirement one of his greatest joys was to go out to the town garbage dump to find pieces of broken, discarded furniture that had been thrown away. He would take those old pieces of now useless furniture back to the wood working shop behind his home. Using the skills of a master carpenter, he carefully and lovingly restored those items of furniture back to a place of usefulness and beauty. He delighted then in giving those items of furniture to others so they could find continued use of them. I know because my oldest son was rocked many a night on an old rocking chair that Luther gave us. Something many thought was worthless and of no value Luther brought back to life in usefulness and beauty for many more years to come.



Jesus, the Master Carpenter, can take your life and mine -- scarred and ruined by sin and rebellion -- and bring it back to life. Something we may have considered worthless now becomes a beautiful, useful part of God's new temple, the church of Jesus Christ. A wasted life is now given opportunity to serve God in the building of Christ's church. Wow! What a precious privilege!

Are you a part of Christ's church? You can become a part this very day. I urge you to commit yourself to the Master Builder who wants to make you a part of His church.

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<sup>12</sup>Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it so that He might make it holy by having cleansed her with the washing of water through the word, so that He could present it to Himself as a glorious church not having spot or blemish or any such things, indeed so that it might be holy and blameless.