

# The Church's One Foundation

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## Introduction.

- A. In the Lord's church, we, among very few others, recognize the importance of a capella singing in worship. We turn to passages like Colossians 3:16, and from these passages, we rightly observe that Christians are commanded only to sing, and that therefore, we must exclude the instrument from our worship.
- B. However, friends, as we look at Colossians 3:16, we need to recognize that there's more to this passage than just a capella singing. Indeed, singing isn't even the primary commandment of the passage. What God actually tells us to do in this verse is to let His word dwell richly within us, and singing is just the natural outpouring of that indwelling. Nor is this singing to be done just for the sake of sounding pretty. In our song, we are to teach and admonish one another, and we are to sing with thankfulness in our hearts to God.
- C. In the course of telling us what we need to do, Paul also tells us some crucial things about what the hymns we use must be like. If my song worship is to be a rich outpouring of the word of God, then the hymns I use must also have the word dwelling richly in them. Otherwise, I cannot use them to express my spiritual understanding. Similarly, unless the Scripture is strongly present in our hymns, we cannot use them to teach and admonish one another in a way that is pleasing to God. The same is even true of our thanksgiving. Unless we are reminded by our hymns of the mighty works of God, for what, precisely, are we thanking Him?
- D. Because this is true, we need to look for the hymns that do the best possible job of expressing the Scripture. A great hymn is great not because it is beautiful or well written, but because it gives voice to God, and allows Him to speak powerfully to His people through His people. Indeed, the very greatest hymns contain in just a few short lines an entire sermon's worth of Biblical instruction. To illustrate this point, I'm going to do exactly that this morning. I'm going to preach an entire sermon using only the Scriptures that are obviously contained in just the first two verses of one hymn, a hymn that is responsible for so much of our understanding about the nature of the church. I'm going to preach from "The Church's One Foundation."

## I. The Church's One Foundation.

- A. **The first verse** of "The Church's One Foundation" is quite familiar to many, perhaps most, of us. Even to someone who's not familiar with all the ins and outs and subtleties of hymnwriting, it's obvious that this is a well-written verse. It has a nice bounce to it, every line rhymes with another line, and the language flows well. However, what makes this verse so impressive are the numerous Scriptures embedded within it.
- B. We see the first obvious Scripture reference in the first two lines. The idea that Jesus is the only foundation for the church is not original to the writer here. Instead, he draws it from **1 Corinthians 3:9-11**, which tells us that the church of Jesus can only be built on Jesus. Brethren, this is one of the most important ideas to our understanding of the church. In the construction world, we understand what it means to build on another foundation. The builder shows up at the site, decides he doesn't like the foundation he's got, and so he goes off, makes another foundation, and builds on it instead. The same thing is true in the spiritual realm. There are many men in the religious world who take a look at the foundation of Jesus as it is described in Scripture and decide they don't like it. They don't like His moral teachings, they don't like His restrictions on worship, they don't like His narrow definition of the work of the church, and so they go off, make a foundation out of their own human ideas, and build a church on that. The problem is, friends, that the church they build isn't the church of Jesus Christ at all. It's the church of whoever laid the foundation.
- C. We need to be better than that. We need to build on the foundation of Jesus. We need to look into the Scripture to see what this foundation looks like, we need to be honest about what we see, and everything we do as a church needs to be based on that teaching. Only if we do that can we rightfully claim to be a part of the church that Christ established, because that's what it means to be founded on Jesus.
- D. This hymn also repeats the Scriptural idea that the church is a new creation of Jesus. This idea is taken, among other places, from **Galatians 6:14-15**. Paul's point here is simple. When he speaks of circumcision and uncircumcision, he's not talking about the physical process. He's talking about the groups of people who either practiced circumcision or didn't—the Jews and the Gentiles, two separate peoples. What Jesus did, though, is to take those different raw materials and make them into one thing—the church, His new creation.
- E. We need to understand this concept because it emphasizes the unity we share in the church of Christ. There are many different kinds of people in this congregation. There are older people. There are younger people. There are people with more money and people with less money. There are white people, black people, Hispanic people—the list goes on and on. In fact, just about every difference that divides people can be found in this one congregation, but we are here because we understand that those differences are less important than what joins us together. We are united by the blood of Jesus. We are one. We are His new creation.

- F. The next portion of the hymn addresses the means by which Jesus created the church and His ultimate motivation for doing so. This three-line chunk is drawn from **Ephesians 5:25-27**. The hymn first uses this passage to explore how Jesus created the church, which, as the Scripture says, was accomplished by the washing of water by the word. There are many passages in the Bible that mention the word “baptism” that prove that baptism is necessary for salvation, but there are many other passages that don’t use the word itself that make the same point. This is one of them. The Greek word translated “washing” here actually means “bath” or “immersion.” From this, we learn that we are sanctified and made part of the church when we are immersed in water by the word, that is, according to the commandments of Scripture. Baptism saves us.
- G. Ephesians 5 also describes Christ’s purpose in purifying the church in this way. Just as a man seeks a woman to be His companion, so also Jesus sought the church as a companion for Himself. Throughout the New Testament, Jesus is compared to a bridegroom, and His church is compared to a bride, holy, without blemish, and entirely suitable for Jesus. This illustrates the depth of the love and attachment that Jesus has for us.
- H. Finally, the last two lines of the verse define how Jesus was able to purify the church to be His bride. Here, the hymnist uses **Revelation 5:9-10** as his Scriptural source. This is part of the heavenly song of praise to the Lamb, and it describes the mighty deeds of Jesus. He was slain, but by his blood He was able to redeem—buy back—His people from their sins. This is an extremely important way for us to understand ourselves. We are not our own, because we have been bought with a price. We don’t get to do what we want to do anymore. Instead, we are under the control of the Savior who has purchased us, and we must live for Him.

## II. Elect from Every Nation.

- A. At this point in time, the hymn moves from its first verse to its second verse, but it’s apparent that the writer has not lost his focus. Indeed, the first line of the second verse comes from the same Scripture as the last line of the first verse—**Revelation 5:9-10**. This Scripture tells us that unlike the Law of Moses, which was for the Jews only, the salvation of Jesus is for everyone. We don’t have to be Jewish to come to God. We don’t have to be Greek to come to God. It’s not about who we’re born as. It’s about who we want to be. No matter who our parents were, as long as we have a heart that wants to serve God, we’re what God wants.
- B. As the author continues this new portion of the discussion, where he defines what the church is rather than what Jesus has done for it, he begins to use a lot of exclusive language in nearly the rest of the verse. The church is one—united under Jesus—and it must also be one in what it believes and practices. This is not a popular thought in today’s religious community. Nowadays, everybody’s interested in unity in diversity. They say, “I’m OK; you’re OK; and as long as we believe in sort of the same God, we can ignore all our other differences.” What this hymn maintains is that in the Lord’s church, such differences do not exist.
- C. It’s a harsh stand, but it only repeats the stand that Scripture takes. Look at what Paul says in **Ephesians 4:4-7**, which is where the writer drew his inspiration. This has some profound implications for us today:
  1. There are not many churches, all connected to God in some diffuse way. Instead, there is one church, and either we follow the pattern of that one church in every way, or we are not a part of it at all.
  2. There are not many religious authorities, from Augustine to Luther to Calvin, to whom we can pay attention. Instead, there is one Lord, and either we obey Him in everything, or we obey Him in nothing.
  3. There are not many religious faiths we can embrace that are equally valid. Instead, there is one faith, and either we accept that one faith, or we have chosen to believe a lie.
  4. There are not multiple ways to become right with God; there are not multiple equally valid practices that we can label with the title of being born again. There is one baptism, and one of two things is true of us. Either we have accepted that baptism, and have had our sins washed away by the blood of Jesus, or we have done something else, and we are still dead in our trespasses and sins.
  5. There are not many, equally valid understandings of the divine. There is one God and Father. Either He is our Father and we are His beloved children, or He is not, and we are not.
  6. There are not many ways to please God and live eternally with Him. There is one hope. Either we have followed God’s plan of salvation and are proceeding to the fulfillment of that hope, or we are hopeless.
- D. As Paul also observes in this passage, however, this unity does not mean that we are Christian clones. There is not one grace, that is to say, there is not one one-size-fits-all package of personality and abilities that God doles out to every Christian. Instead, within the unity of the church, we serve in different ways, so that by our action, we ensure that the church has everything that it requires to fully function.
- E. Finally, though, there’s one line in the verse that does not draw its content from Ephesians 4. When the writer discusses “one holy food,” he’s actually drawing his content from 1 Corinthians 10:16-17. This is an idea that should shape the way we understand the Lord’s Supper. When we partake of the bread, we’re not just affirming our unity with God. We’re also affirming our unity with each other. We are declaring that we are united in love and in spirit by the act of partaking of one bread.

**Conclusion.** By contrast, the third verse of “The Church’s One Foundation” is not so Scripturally dense. Instead, it describes the contrast between God’s plan for a unified church and the confusion of the present-day religious world. However, friends, this confusion will not last forever. The day will come when God’s will will triumph.