



## The Apostles' Teaching

# Preface

**“They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayer.” Acts 2:42<sup>1</sup>**

This verse tells us that following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, the Christ Followers of the primitive church “continually devoted” themselves to **“the apostles’ teaching and fellowship”**, as well as to the breaking of bread and prayer”. I have written on the breaking of bread and prayer in other articles.<sup>2</sup> This article deals with **“the apostles’ teaching and fellowship”**. We will consider the content, the nature, and the goal of apostolic teaching<sup>3</sup>.

## What Did the Apostles Teach?

As we know the existing body of scripture at the time of Christ which the apostles could draw from was the 24 books of the Hebrew Bible, or the “Tanakh” – what we now call “The Old Testament”. In the Old Testament, we have Teaching ABOUT Christ:

**“Therefore, leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity.” Hebrews 6:1a**

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<sup>1</sup> All scripture quotations are taken from the *New American Standard Bible* unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> [“Breaking of Bread”](#) and [“Seeking God for Guidance in the Work of God”](#)

<sup>3</sup> Greek: *didache*, Strong’s # 1322, doctrine, instruction, teaching

In Hebrews 5:12 we find the phrase: **“the elementary principles of the oracles of God”**. And in Hebrews 6:1 we have the phrase: **“the elementary teaching about the Christ”**. I believe the writer to the Hebrews regarded these two phrases to be essentially synonymous. Let’s look at them a little more closely. The literal translation of Hebrews 5:12 would be: **“The beginning (*arche*) of the orderly arrangement or system (*stoicheion*) of God’s word (*logos*).”** The author is pointing to the writings of the Old Testament – those writings which these Hebrews would have known very well. The literal translation of Hebrews 6:1 would be: **“The beginning (*arche*) of the doctrine (*logos*) about the Christ”**. The beginning of the doctrine about the Christ also points to the writings of the Old Testament. When the resurrected Christ met the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus, **“Beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the scriptures”** – namely the Old Testament. (Luke 24:27)

So, we see that the beginning of the doctrine about the Christ does not start in the gospels or the epistles, but in the Old Testament. Although it was in the symbols of typology in the Old Testament, the doctrine of Christ began in the Old Testament; and when the Jewish Christians had received the Spirit of Christ, they would have been able to see Christ revealed in the Old Testament scriptures. The writer to the Hebrews specifies the following which are CONTAINED IN OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES: **“... a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, the doctrine of baptisms (washings), and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.”** Hebrews 6:1b - 2

Just a few reflections on the all-important “foundation”: The foundation is THE Foundation. The apostle Paul explained: **“According to the grace of God, which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, .... no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”** (1 Corinthians 3:10-11) Paul identifies THE Foundation as Jesus – **a revelation and relationship with Jesus is the Foundation of a spiritual house.** Jesus said He would build His Church upon the revelation of Himself.<sup>4</sup> The Church consists of those who are in relationship with Him. This relationship with Christ grows by way of revelation of Christ.

The apostle Peter wrote: **“You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.... The preciousness is for those who believe.”** (1 Peter 2:5, 7) Just as with any material house, everyone in the house depends on – exercises faith in the foundation. THE Foundation of the house of God<sup>5</sup> is Jesus Christ. Everything and every activity taking place in this spiritual house depend upon the Foundation which is Jesus Christ. And these six “foundation stones” join us to the Cornerstone in THE Foundation of that spiritual house. The foundation stones properly joined to the Cornerstone will pass the plumb line test of the Builder. Doctrine that properly joins you to Jesus Christ is sound doctrine.

In Hebrews 6:2, there are listed the teachings that describe a biblical experience of the Christ of God. These are the teachings which give a biblical explanation regarding a relationship with

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Matthew 16:15-18

<sup>5</sup> Cf. 1 Corinthians 3:9

Jesus Christ. The understanding and experience of each of these teachings by way of revelation and relationship with Christ is what constitutes laying the Foundation of Christ in the life of a believer for that believer to achieve maturity.

I would like to draw your attention to the inherent orderly arrangement of this list of teachings. There are six teachings listed. There are three groups of two teachings. In each of these groups, the first teaching leads to the second. Each of these groups leads to the next. The six teachings cover the whole of the Christian life from here on the earth on into eternity – God’s entire plan of salvation – What it means to be “saved”.

- **repentance from dead works and of faith toward God** – these are Man’s acts toward God.
- **the doctrine of baptisms and laying on of hands** – these symbolize a uniting of Man with God.
- **the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment** – these are God’s acts toward Man.

It is not within the scope of this article to exposit each of these teachings. But elsewhere I have related teaching articles: “[The Meaning of Repentance](#)”, “[Coming to Faith in God](#)”, “[The Meaning of Baptism](#)”, “[Receiving the Gift of the Holy Spirit](#)”, and “[You Must Be Born Again](#)”, all of which are compiled in a book entitled “[C H A N G E D: A Closer Look at Things Relating to Conversion](#)”.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> I can also suggest *Laying the Foundation* by James Lee Beall, Bridge Logos, 1980, ISBN: 0882701983. This excellent publication is in a catechism format consisting of 36 personal home-study lessons with review questions.

# Teaching ABOUT Christ

## ~ The Old Testament ~

- The Revelation begins in the Old Testament types and is fulfilled in Christ Jesus.
  - The Spiritual Goal: “... seeing Him who is unseen...” (Hebrews 11:27b)
  - SEEING CHRIST in the Old Testament types is nicely summarized in The Letter to the Hebrews.
  - “The beginnings of the discourse concerning Christ...” is in the Old Testament. (Hebrews 6:1, lit.)
  - Christ IS the “better things” referred to in the Letter to the Hebrews. (Hebrews 11:40)
  - “...the shadow of the Good Things to come (Christ)...” (Hebrews 8:5, 10:1)
  - “...but the substance belongs to Christ...” (Colossians 2:17)
  - A “shadow” is *revelation* of Christ. The “substance” is *relationship* with Christ.
- Seeing Christ – in the Old Testament types:
  - The Tabernacle: Exodus 25-40
  - The Priesthood: Exodus 28-29 & 39
  - The Feasts: Exodus 23 & Leviticus 23

# Teaching OF Christ

## ~ The Gospels ~

- The testimony about Christ *by the prophets* – the visions of Ezekiel (1:4-28) and John on the Island of Patmos (Revelation 1:1, 4:6-11, 19:10) come through the Four Gospels:
  - Matthew: The Lion (of Judah): The Lord and King

- Mark: The Ox: The (Suffering) Servant
- Luke: The Son of Man (Redeemed Humanity): The Pattern Son
- John: The Eagle: The Divinity of Christ
- The Revelation of THE WHOLE CHRIST: for relationship & for evangelism.
- The testimony about the Christ *by Jesus of Nazareth and by God the Father*:
  - The Beatitudes: Matthew 5:1-12 ~ *The Character of the King and His Kingdom*
  - The Sermon on the Mount: Matthew 5-7 ~ *The Law of the King and His Kingdom*
  - The Parables: *The Mysteries of the King and His Kingdom* (Mark4:11)

## Teaching **ABOUT** Christ ~ The Apostolic Epistles ~

*The Apostles' Teaching lays THE Foundation of Christ by building Revelation of Christ and Relationship with Christ with a view to Reflection of Christ.*

The Jewish people had always devoted themselves to **teaching and learning the Scriptures**. This was the main activity taking place in the synagogues. As a young man, Jesus **studied the Scriptures** in the synagogue.<sup>7</sup> When Jesus began His public ministry, He **taught** the people in the synagogues.<sup>8</sup> After the Jews in Jerusalem accepted Jesus as the Messiah on the Day of

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<sup>7</sup> Luke 2:46-47

<sup>8</sup> Luke 4:15-20, 6:6, 13:10

Pentecost, **“they continued steadfastly” – “they devoted themselves” – to the apostles’ teaching.**

What were the apostles teaching? Everything Jesus had taught them. This was the commission He had given them: **“Go and make disciples (or learners)... teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you....”<sup>9</sup>**

So, what did Jesus teach the disciples? Jesus’ parables<sup>10</sup>, what we call the “Sermon on the Mount”<sup>11</sup> and the “Sermon on the Plain”<sup>12</sup> embody the main teachings of Jesus and are essentially a **revelation** of the nature and character of God.

Jesus’ teaching **revealed** the Father<sup>13</sup>; and **the apostles’ teaching revealed Jesus**. Since **Jesus is THE Foundation** of the Church<sup>14</sup>, the **apostles’ teaching**, which **reveals the mystery of Christ**<sup>15</sup>, is a **foundational** to the life of the individual Christ follower and **the collective life of the Church**.

As our **relationship** with Christ is **the foundation of the Christian life**, so too is our **revelation** of Christ an integral part of that **foundation**. Our **revelation** of Christ determines our **relationship** with Christ. Because we can only relate to what we know, our **relationship** with Christ is limited to our **revelation** of

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew 28:19-20

<sup>10</sup> E.g. Matthew 13:1-52, Mark 4:1-33, Luke 8:4-18

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 5:3-7:27

<sup>12</sup> Luke 6:20-49

<sup>13</sup> John 1:18, 8:19, 14:7

<sup>14</sup> I Corinthians 3:10-11

<sup>15</sup> Ephesians 3:4-5

Christ. As our **revelation** of Christ grows, so our **relationship** with Christ grows.

## Apostolic Teaching

I understand the term, “apostolic teaching”<sup>16</sup>, to mean teaching of a particular genre and quality with a particular approach and goal. It is obvious that the Christians in the Western nations have a plethora of teaching. Personally, I think it is just as obvious that there is a dearth of **apostolic** teaching. The Church has a need to “continue steadfastly” and “be devoted to” **apostolic** teaching. The New Testament Scriptures explicitly tell us that **the foundation of Christ is laid in the Church by apostolic teaching**.<sup>17</sup> What does this mean? How does **apostolic** teaching lay the foundation of Christ in the Church? When God gives people a particular ministry, He also gives the necessary grace and gifts to fulfill that ministry. **The apostolic teaching ministry is the special grace and gift to teach the revelation of the mystery of Christ in such a way as to bring a people into fullness of relationship with Christ.**

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<sup>16</sup> So that the reader doesn't miss the point of what I desire to communicate here: The debate concerning whether the ministry of the apostle still exists for the Church today or “passed away” in the first century, in this case, is quite beside the point. *Apostolic* (adjective) teaching, based on the apostles' (noun) teaching recorded in the Scriptures is an absolutely necessary and sorely lacking *genre and quality of teaching* having a particular approach and goal – viz. to lay the foundation of Christ and to build Christ experientially in the lives of individuals and churches. I am focusing here on the adjective, *apostolic*, rather than the noun, *apostle* – i.e. a genre and *quality* of faith and practice (Jude 3), rather than a *supposed* job description of an apostle.

<sup>17</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:10-11, Ephesians 2:20, 3:1-7

# “According to the Letter” & “According to the Spirit”

Not all teachings “are created equal” so to speak. This is essentially what the apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth: **“(God) made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”**<sup>18</sup> There are two very different ways to approach teaching: *The way of the letter, or the way of the Spirit*. The one is **the formula approach**; the other is **the spiritual formation approach**. Both promise to change your life. But one gives only the appearance of change, or at best, a temporary change on the outside. The other affects true, lasting change from the inside.

The formula approach is pragmatic with easy-to-follow formulas, and clearly defined action steps for practical life application. For example - *7 Steps to Successful Christian Living*. This approach is popular because it is the lazy man’s approach to Christianity. Rather than invest the time and energy into knowing God, studying the Scriptures, praying, seeking God’s wisdom and guidance, many people just want to be told what they should do in practical, easy to follow formulas.

Right from the beginning, this approach has always been popular. God wanted **“a kingdom of priests”**,<sup>19</sup> but the Hebrew people wanted a king.<sup>20</sup> Rather than hear God for themselves, they

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<sup>18</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:6

<sup>19</sup> Exodus 19:6

<sup>20</sup> 1 Samuel 8:5-7

preferred to hear from Moses. They found it more convenient for Moses to report back to them what God had to say, rather than go up on the fiery mountain to hear from God for themselves.<sup>21</sup>

Whereas, God has said the promise of His New Covenant is **“they all shall know Me from the least of them to the greatest of them”**<sup>22</sup>, many people do not want to accept the responsibility of the New Covenant – namely, the responsibility of **knowing God in a personal relationship**.

Like the apostles’ teaching, **apostolic teaching** does not have a formula approach. The *7 Steps to Successful Christian Living* approach is not the apostolic mindset or goal. **Apostolic teaching** is teaching with a view to **spiritual formation**. The apostle Paul told the disciples at Galatia that his ministry was like being in labor in the birthing process, **“until Christ was formed in them”**.<sup>23</sup>

The apostle Paul taught that, **AS ONE RECEIVES REVELATION OF CHRIST, THE HOLY SPIRIT TRANSFORMS YOU INTO HIS IMAGE:**

**“But we all, with unveiled faces, looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord [“the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (4:6)], (we) are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.” 2 Corinthians 3:18**

He told the disciples in Colossae his ministry was all about

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<sup>21</sup> Exodus 20:19

<sup>22</sup> Jeremiah 31:34

<sup>23</sup> Galatians 4:19

**"... Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, admonishing everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, that we may present everyone perfect<sup>24</sup> in Christ Jesus."**

Colossians 1:27-28

I'll give you an example of the difference between **the formula approach** and **the spiritual formation** approach to teaching: The Bible commands men to **"love your wives just as Christ also loved the Church"**; and commands women to **"submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord."**<sup>25</sup> Now, how would the Holy Spirit have this taught to couples? **The formula approach** would be to conduct workshops, at the end of which, the men could bring home a sheet with a list of "one size fits all" practical action steps to loving your wife. They could post that sheet somewhere handy and use it as a daily check list.

For example:

- "When your wife asks you if a particular dress makes her look fat, be sure you heard the question correctly, and then always answer 'No'".
- "Remember to regularly bring home chocolates and flowers, and be sure they are fresh cut flowers, even though the artificial ones may be less expensive."
- Etc., etc.

I'm being facetious, but how many of you women would really be convinced with this type of exercise? Is this really *"What Jesus Would Do"*? And what if, as in my case, your wife is allergic to

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<sup>24</sup> That is, complete and mature in their relationship with Christ Jesus.

<sup>25</sup> Ephesians 5:22-33

chocolates? Also, how can you justify the chocolates if she is already looking a little too fat in that dress anyway?

In any case, does this pragmatic, practical, “one size fits all”, **formula approach** really even “work”? Can you guarantee those *7 Easy Steps to Becoming a Submissive Wife* will really give sufficient understanding and wisdom to a woman for those “gray areas” arising in a situation where the husband doesn’t share the wife’s faith in Christ?

Alternatively, in the **spiritual formation approach**, a man could receive **revelation** from the Scriptures by the Spirit on how **“Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her”**. *By this “beholding” he can be transformed into Christ’s image<sup>26</sup>*, and be enabled by the Holy Spirit to express self-denying love to his wife in ways that are according to the uniqueness of his nature and personality.

And a wife can receive **revelation** of Christ’s obedience to the Father, and what it means for the church to maintain a submissive attitude toward Christ. *By this “beholding” she can be transformed into Christ’s image<sup>27</sup>*, and be enabled by the Holy Spirit to submit to her husband **“as to the Lord”**. She will also be assured that the Holy Spirit understands those “gray areas”, and that she is not alone in the situation.

With the spiritual formation approach, **apostolic teaching is focused on Revelation of Christ, Relationship with Christ, and Reflection of Christ**. And with the “beholding” of Christ – “the

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<sup>26</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:18 (+ 4:6)

<sup>27</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:18 (+4:6)

glory of the Lord” “revealed in the face of Jesus Christ” – *people are transformed into Christ’s image to be godly husbands and wives*. In addition, both husbands and wives can be assured of what the apostle Paul wrote to the church in Rome: “... We know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose for them.... to become like his Son....”<sup>28</sup>

## Teaching for Transformation Revelation for Relationship

Apostolic teaching is done for the purpose of spiritual formation – the formation of Christ in you – to transform you into the image of Christ. Therefore, apostolic teaching is done in faith that what Jesus said is true: “The words that I have spoken to you are from that life-giving Spirit.”<sup>29</sup> Apostolic teaching is done in faith that what the writer of Hebrews said is true: “... the word of God is living and active”<sup>30</sup> and “... the word of God is full of living power”<sup>31</sup> – able to form Christ in you<sup>32</sup>, and able to transform you into the image of Christ.<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, the goals of apostolic teaching are revelation of Christ and relationship with Christ because our relationship with Christ is the foundation of our spiritual house – our Christian life, and building upon that foundation, our revelation of Christ builds our relationship with Christ and determines the

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<sup>28</sup> Romans 8:28-29 *New Living Translation*

<sup>29</sup> *The New Living Translation & the Contemporary English Version*

<sup>30</sup> Hebrews 4:12 *New American Standard Version*

<sup>31</sup> Hebrews 4:12 *New Living Translation*

<sup>32</sup> Galatians 4:19, Ephesians 4:13

<sup>33</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:18 (+ 4:6)

parameters and dynamics of our **relationship with Christ**. As apostolic teaching lays that foundation, **JESUS BUILDS HIS CHURCH BY REVELATION OF HIMSELF**.

## ADDENDUM

### Apostolic Fellowship

Acts 2:42 tells us that the disciples **“were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship....”** In his commentary on this verse, John Gill, reminds us that the disciples were also fellowshiping with the apostles. The syntax in the Greek text has *both the teaching and the fellowship referring back to the apostles*. In fact, *The Amplified Bible* translates it as: **“the instruction and fellowship of the apostles”**.

**“... He gave gifts to men.... And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as shepherds and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ....”**

Ephesians 4:7, 11-12<sup>34</sup>

This passage tells us that *Jesus gave certain gifts to men and gave certain men as gifts to the Church*. Something that is important for us to understand is this: In building His Church,<sup>35</sup> **Jesus blesses men – not methods**. There may be some value in considering methodologies for how to make disciples; but in the end, Jesus blesses disciples **through men** rather than through methods.

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<sup>34</sup> The “as” in the NASB, and “to be” in the NKJV are not in the Greek text.

<sup>35</sup> Matthew 16:18

*Jesus gave certain gifts to men and gave certain men as gifts to the Church.* The apostle Paul could say to the Thessalonians, **“You know what kind of men we proved ourselves to be....”**<sup>36</sup> What qualifies these men to equip the Church is not their fulfilling the presupposed “job descriptions” of an “apostle” (or a “prophet”, or an “evangelist”, or a “shepherd”, or a “teacher”),<sup>37</sup> but rather who they are as **ambassadors of Christ**<sup>38</sup>. These are men who **“have been with Jesus”**<sup>39</sup>, and bring something of the presence of Jesus.

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## At Christ's Table - ACTpublications

*“Explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words.”*

1 Corinthians 2:13

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W.D. Furioso, Writer ~ Frances Furioso, Editor

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<sup>36</sup> 1 Thessalonians 1:5 *The Amplified Bible*

<sup>37</sup> Ephesians 4:11

<sup>38</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:20

<sup>39</sup> Acts 4:13

Bill & Frances Furioso  
~ At Christ's Table ~



Bill Furioso and his wife, Frances, have been married for more than 40 years, and have two children, four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Bill and Frances served as missionaries in South Africa for thirteen years making disciples, establishing churches, and training church leaders. Over a span of 40 years, they also traveled extensively in an itinerant Bible teaching ministry which took them to hundreds of gatherings on four continents ministering in churches, conferences, spiritual formation seminars, and home gatherings. They have shepherded several churches, discipled many to Christ, and mentored church leaders in the USA and abroad.

Being an avid student by nature, Bill has done both formal and informal study in various fields including Education, Music, Philosophy and Theology. As a writer, he has authored many publications which are distributed worldwide. Because of Bill's disabilities resulting from a spinal cord injury, their ministries of writing, recording, distributing, mentoring, and correspondence are now shared primarily via the Internet...

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