**Was Jesus a lousy builder?**

If a faithful evangelical Christian took a time machine back to the first few centuries of Christianity, in any country, and decided to go to church on Sunday, he would not recognize what he saw. A faithful Catholic would. That is because the earliest Christians' doctrines and methods of worship align closely with modern Catholic doctrines and today's Mass. This is a historical fact confirmed by simply researching the vast collection of ancient Christian documents available to us today. It may be surprising that most of the major tenants of Protestantism (e.g. symbolic communion, justification by faith alone, a 66 book Canon, Sola Scriptura, and symbolic/believer-only baptism) can nowhere be found in any early Christian writings.

So how can that historical fact be squared with modern non-Catholic's account that THEIR denomination (whether it be Lutherans, Calvanists, Methodists, Anglicans, Baptists, Presbyterians, Quakers, Puritans, or "non-denominational") represents the pure, original Christian faith taught by Jesus and the Apostles?

There's only one explanation: Their theory is that the original apostolic faith looked just like theirs, but within a few decades, the organized Christian church fell into a Great Apostasy and corruption. They began piling up errors and man-made traditions and rituals and by the 2nd and 3rd centuries was nothing like what Jesus preached and certainly not what He intended for His followers to do. But fortunately, the theory goes, the leader or founder of their particular Christian denomination figured that out and presented the pure, original Christian faith to his followers - like it was in the beginning. It was at that time that the true Christian faith was restored.

There are three major flaws in this version of Christian history:

1. If Christianity wallowed in gross error (Catholicism) for centuries (say the 2nd – 16th) until recent "reformations" got it right, Jesus' assurance that the Holy Spirit, *("whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." John 14:26)* was only temporary for that generation. It was very short lived. His assurance did not apply to millions/billions of people who lived between then and the year of the "Great Correction" - whenever your denomination recaptured "true Christianity". They were all led astray by the erroneous Catholic Church. **Was that what He meant?**

2. It means Jesus built His Church, and it failed immediately. At least it was so weak, and the Apostles were such poor teachers, that anything resembling the "true faith" was so quickly encrusted with the barnacles of man-made traditions, rituals, idol worship, a false priesthood, etc, that Christianity was practically unrecognizable right off the bat.

But that theory clashes with Jesus' promise to Peter that "You are Peter (kepha), and upon this rock (kepha) I will build My Church. And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matt 16:16-18) That theory of a Great Apostasy or falling away sure means that the gates of hell DID prevail for many centuries preventing mankind from knowing the true Gospel revealed perfectly by Christ in the 1st century.

The theory of the Great Apostasy (a rapid explosion of the Gospel….then over a thousand years of gross error…..then a recent "restoration" of truth) is also contrary to the images of the nature of the kingdom of God given in Scripture:

 The kingdom of heaven is like…..

 - a stone that grows into a mountain covering the earth,

 - a mustard seed that grows into a great tree,

 - the small amount of leaven that gradually leavens the entire measure,

 - the wheat and tares where the weeds and wheat are allowed to gradually grow together until harvest at the end of the age

3. Only ONE – at most - of the hundreds of modern denominations can actually be the one that has truly returned to the “original apostolic faith”. Because they all conflict on major doctrines. How is a seeker of Christian truth today to know which of the hundreds of conflicting versions of Christianity is the one that matches the pure, original faith Jesus taught? Simple. See which one follows the Bible, right? But they all claim to do that and only ONE at most, by definition, is correct in that assertion.

Jesus did not leave it up to each individual to wade through all the very convincing versions of His faith that would arise throughout history in order to determine the true Gospel. He selected and taught a few men personally, then instructed them to “make disciples, baptize, and teach all that I have commanded you”. And He said He would be with them ALWAYS – even until the end of the age. He did not say there would be over 1500 yrs where His Gospel would fall into “great error” to the entire world.

You can't say Christianity all over the world was lost for 1500+ yrs leading everyone down the road to false teaching - until your particular denomination got it right - AND also accept that the "gates of hell shall not prevail against" His Church. It means you conclude that Jesus was a lousy builder – which no Christian would want to say. But you can't have it both ways.