

## My Church

The most misunderstood subject in the religious world of Christendom is the Church. The idea of three hundred (300) different religious bodies referring to themselves as Christians did not have its origin in the Bible. The Scriptures precisely and specifically pointed out the absolute oneness of the church. It is the aim of this lesson to encourage the student of the Bible to acquaint himself with the New Testament pattern of the church to such a degree that he will be able to recognize "THE CHURCH" in a "Church saturated" world today.

Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, "...I will build "MY CHURCH." He did not say that he had any intention of building three hundred churches. The Lord prayed, "That they all may be ONE, as thou Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:21). It was the Lord's greatest desire that all people who are converted to Christianity should be ONE. As Jesus and the Father are ONE, ALL those professing to be Christians should be ONE.

The Apostle Paul wrote the Corinthians saying, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no division among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and the same judgment" (I Corinthians 1:10). In this passage there are four things that endorse unity and condemn division.

Because of division, the world rejects salvation. People of the world cannot be encouraged to obey Jesus and become a member of his church when "so called" Christians divide, speak different doctrines, waste money on selfish schemes, and then say this is Christ's religion. The world will not accept the doctrine of Christ while his advocates practice another. The only way the world will be brought to Christ, is for all men to speak ONLY the gospel of our Lord.

## BIBLE UNITY

We shall note some references that prove the scriptures teach only one church. Paul wrote, "And he is the head of THE BODY, the CHURCH" (Colossians 1:18). Again, "... and gave him to be THE HEAD over all things to THE CHURCH, which is HIS BODY" (Ephesians 1:22, 23). Also consider, "There is ONE BODY" (Ephesians 4:4). Then note, "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as CHRIST is the head of the CHURCH: and he is the SAVIOUR of THE BODY" (Ephesians 5:23). In all of these scriptures, and others, the bible student immediately recognizes the Bible teaches there is only ONE BODY, the CHURCH. The BIBLE demands unity. To have division is sinful.

## WHAT IS THE CHURCH

Possibly one reason for the division that exists in the religious world can be traced to a misunderstanding of the Church. Many people consider the church building as the church. These people feel the Temple, Cathedral, or any building used as a church is the

church. However, since the church is a spiritual institution, its members are those who “have been delivered out of darkness and translated into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Colossians 1:13). The word church itself means, “the called out.” The conclusion then in answering the question of “what is the church?” is that it consists of all people whom God has added to the body (Acts 2:47)

## CHRIST And His CHURCH

Another major factor resulting in the sinful division of religion is the fact that most religious bodies teach that a person can obtain salvation at one time in their life, and then later “join the church of his choice.” However, this is a false assumption because it is impossible to separate Christ and his church. If you are not in his church you do NOT have Christ.

Jesus is the head of the church which is his body (Colossians 1:18). If you take Christ, or the head, from the body, death will result. Therefore, to be in Christ is to be in his body, the church. Jesus adds every saved person to his church (Acts 2:47), and there is no other way to enter the church.

## THE NEW TESTAMENT PATTERN

Since the New Testament is the inspired word of God, he has given all men a pattern of the true church in it. In the search today for the true church or our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ we must first establish the one source of authority upon which all things must be based.

One important thing the bible student must remember is the fact that the church Jesus built in the 1<sup>st</sup> century is described in detail in the Bible. We then have the “Pattern” we are seeking today. The Bible student will then seek the church today that follows exactly that “Biblical pattern;” one that speaks where the Bible speaks, and is silent; one that practices what the Lord commands.

There are several outstanding characteristics of the Lord’s church that make it easy to recognize in the religious world today. These marks must be exactly like the pattern or it will not be the true church, so the Bible student must be careful to check the things God has required.

### Authority

One outstanding characteristics in the church today is the same as in the beginning, and that one is the ONE SOURCE or AUTHORITY. During the early days of the church the apostles and Christians were guided by the word of God in all things in religion. Today we MUST use the same source or the church will not be according to the pattern. John said, “whosoever transgresseth, and abideth NOT in the Doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, hath both the Father and the Son” (11 John 9).

There is no other source or authority in religion. Many religious groups have their own creed and doctrine written down in Standards, Prayerbooks, Manuals, Catechisms, etc., but the Lord's church uses the Bible as the only source of authority

### Entrance Into the Church

Another important trait that must be observed today exactly as obeyed in the 1<sup>st</sup> century is the way a person is admitted into the church. Really, there is only one way into the church, and that is to believe in Jesus (John 8:24), Repent of sins (Acts 17:30), Confess Jesus Christ (Romans 10:9-10), and be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38, 22:16).

When a person obeys from the heart (Romans 6:16-18) these commandments, then and only then, will God add him to the church. There is no other way. You cannot "Join" the church; only God can add you to the body of Christ.

### One Way Worship

A third characteristic that can be found in the New Testament pattern of the church is its worship. There are many forms of worship, but only one scriptural and acceptable way (John 4:24). It is a scriptural fact that the early church came together on the FIRST DAY of the week to worship (Acts 20:7, Revelation 1:10). Also, when they came together it was to observe the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7). A description and evidence of the action is seen in 1 Corinthians 11:20-34 (Read). Any church NOT observing the Lord's Supper every week is not following the true pattern.

These early Christians worshipped God on the first day of the week by singing and praying (Colossians 3:16, 17); (Ephesians 5:19). They sang praises to God, but did NOT use mechanical instruments of music. They prayed prayers of thanksgiving and petitions. Any religious group using instruments of music in the worship is NOT following the pattern.

They also GAVE of their means (1 Corinthians 16:1, 2). Every Christian is expected to give as he has been prospered of God (11 Corinthians 9:7). A failure to do so is a failure to obey God. The New Testament church does NOT have bingo parties or raffles to raise money for the Lord, but every Christian GIVES as he is prospered.

These actions composed the New Testament pattern of worship. Any religion departing from this pattern is NOT the New Testament church. Every Bible student should be careful to note the scriptural plan of worship, and seek that group practicing ONLY these things.

### Organization of the Church

One final object of search for the bible student should be to find the religious group that is scripturally organized. The scriptures teach that the Lord's church is governed by a

plurality of qualified elders who are also called bishops, and overseers (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1; Philippians 1:1). They are assisted by qualified men called deacons (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1). The evangelists, or preachers, serve as teachers and leaders under the elders. They are charged with preaching the word (11 Timothy 4:1,2). All members, including those mentioned above are called saints (Philippians 1:1,2), Christians (Acts 11:26), and Priests (1 Peter 2:9). Any departure from these characteristics is sinful, and NOT according to the pattern.

### One Head

There is no earthly headquarters. Since Jesus is the head of the church, which is his body, and he is in heaven, then no place is found for a central headquarters on earth. Each local congregation is independent of all others, following only the instructions of Jesus.

### Summary

The Bible student has now studied the pattern of the New Testament church that Jesus said is “MY CHURCH”. In searching for this church the student should keep in mind the things mentioned in this study and seek those things in the church today. God will NOT accept error.