



Lesson 10 The Church

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THE CHURCH

“But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Galatians 4:4-5).

Jesus Christ had come to Earth, bringing the “good news” about the last and final covenant that Heaven would make with man. The series of events that began with the birth of Jesus Christ, and ended in His death, burial, and resurrection, stirred a whirlwind of controversy in the first century. Twenty centuries later, it still does.

Christ spent three-and-a-half years teaching in order to make disciples. When He finally was ready to call them to action, it was not for a quiet retreat into the peaceful, nearby hills. He never intended that they be “holy men” who set themselves apart to spend each hour of every day in quiet meditation. Instead, they were to be soldiers—ready for a spiritual battle against the forces of evil (Ephesians 6:10-17). Jesus called for action, self-denial, uncompromising love for truth, and zeal coupled with knowledge. His words to those who would follow Him were: “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Mark 8:34). And many did.

The teaching, however, did not stop when Christ returned to heaven. He had trained others—apostles and disciples—to continue the work He had begun. They were sent to the uttermost parts of the Earth to proclaim the Gospel boldly through preaching and teaching (Matthew 28:18-20). They did this daily, and many new disciples were added. These new disciples were instructed and taught the fundamentals of God’s Word, and then sent on their way to teach others.

The results were amazing. In one day, in a single city, over 3,000 people became members of the original church as a result of the teaching they had heard from the apostle Peter (see Acts 2:41). In fact, preaching about Jesus worked so well that the enemies of Christianity tried to stop any further public teaching (Acts 4:18; 5:28), but they could not. Approximately 2,000 years later, the story of the Cross is still alive, vibrant, and powerful.

Furthermore, Christians do not have an option regarding the sharing of their faith. The value of God’s saving grace, made possible through His Son Jesus Christ, is a message that all responsible people need to hear, and one that Christians are commanded to proclaim (Matthew 28:18-20; Ezekiel 33:7-9).

CHRIST'S CHURCH IS HIS UNIQUE BODY OF SAVED BELIEVERS

At one point in Jesus' life, He asked His disciples how the public viewed Him. "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" (Matthew 16:13). The reply of the disciples was: "Some say, John the Baptist; some, Elijah; and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets" (16:14). Then He asked the disciples another question: "But who do **you** say that I am?" (16:15). Simon Peter quickly answered: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (16:16). Jesus' response to Peter was this: "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (16:17-18).

Jesus had come—"in the fulness of time"—to bring the one thing that all the Earth's people needed. From Cain, the first murderer, to the men who would put Christ to death on the cross, mankind desperately needed God's salvation. In fact, throughout the history of Israel, God made promises and prophecies concerning a coming kingdom and its King. The promise was that from David's seed, God would build a "house" and "kingdom" (2 Samuel 7:11-17—a promise that was fulfilled when the church began in Acts 2: 29-34).

When Jesus told Peter that He would build His church upon a "rock," He did exactly what the Old Testament prophets had foretold hundreds of years before. Isaiah prophesied: "Therefore thus says the Lord God: 'Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; whoever believes will not act hastily'" (28:16). Later, Peter himself would mention this very rock foundation when he wrote about the "living stone, rejected indeed by men.... The stone which the builders rejected, has become the chief cornerstone" (1 Peter 2:4,7). In fact, even Jesus mentioned the "rejected stone" of Old Testament reference. In Matthew 21:42, Mark 12:10, and Luke 20:17, He mentioned the statement (from Psalm 118: 22) about "the stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone," and applied the rejection of the stone to the Jewish leaders' rejection of Him.

Jesus made it clear that there would be one and only one church. Paul wrote that Christ "is the head of **the body, the church**" (Colossians 1:18). In Ephesians 1:22, he stated concerning Christ that God "gave him to be head over all things to the church, **which is his body.**" Thus, Paul clearly identified the body as the church. Three chapters later, however, in Ephesians 4:4, Paul stated: "There is **one body.**" Expressed simply, one might reason as follows:

There is one body (Ephesians 4:4).

Christ is the Savior of the body (Ephesians 5:23).

Thus, Christ is the Savior of **one body**.

And,

Christ is the Savior of one body.

The body is the church (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18,24).

Thus, Christ is the Savior of **one church**.

The body, Christ's church, would be known as "the church of the Lord" (Acts 20:28), "the church of God" (1 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:13), "the house of God" (1 Timothy 3:15), "the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10), and "the kingdom of God" (Acts 28:23,31). The Lord's people were to wear Christ's name (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16). The church would be His bride (Revelation 21:2) and His kingdom (Revelation 1:9). Only those in Christ's one church would be victorious over Satan and defeat death forever (1 Corinthians 15:26,54-56; 2 Timothy 1:9-10).

Unfortunately, throughout history, men have tried to alter the divine plan and to add their own personal belief systems. Thus, the idea of denominationalism was born. Denominationalism, however, is unknown to the Word of God, and thus is not acceptable to God. A denomination is defined as "a class or kind having a specific name or value." We speak of different monetary denominations—a five-dollar bill, a ten-dollar bill, etc. They all are different. The same is true of religious denominations. They all are different.

Denominationalism ignores the uniqueness of the true church, and instead establishes various groups teaching different doctrines that contradict both the Bible and each other. It also ignores the church's relationship to Christ, which is described so beautifully in Ephesians 5 where Paul reminded first-century Christians that "the husband is the head of the wife, as also Christ is the head of the church" (5:23).

Denominations are man-made institutions that are neither recognized nor approved by the Word of God. The simple truth of the matter is that while Martin Luther was a great reformer, the fact remains that he did not die to establish the church. Why, then, desire to be a member of a denomination bearing his name rather than the name of Christ—Who **did** die to establish the church? The early church's presbyters (i.e., elders, bishops, overseers) did not give their lives on a cross to establish the church. Why, then, should anyone want to be a member of a denomination named after them, rather than the Son of God? Why be a member of a denomination established by John Wesley and known for certain "methods" used to worship God? Why seek to be a member of a denomination named after people—"baptists"—who recognize immersion as the scriptural mode of baptism? And, the Bi-

ble—although it correctly tells of the coming of the church and documents its arrival—did not make the church possible. Why, then, be a member of a “Bible church”? **It is impossible to be a member of a man-made denomination and be a faithful member of the Lord’s church at the same time.** Shouldn’t Christians simply seek to be a member of the one true church that honors Christ’s authority—the church He bought with His blood? It is His bride; He is its bridegroom. In the Bible, His congregations are known as the “churches of Christ” (Romans 16:16).

Those who are true New Testament Christians are those who have done exactly what God has commanded them to do to be saved, in exactly the way God has commanded that it be done. In so doing, they have not “joined” some man-made religious denomination. If the church is the body, and if there is only one body, then there is only one church. Some people think that any church will do, and that a person should just “join the church of his choice.” But God says that there is only **one** church. Furthermore, a person does not “join” the church. The Scriptures teach that as a person is obedient, God Himself “adds” that person to the one true church (Acts 2:41) that bears His Son’s name.

CHRIST’S TRIUMPHANT CHURCH

From the beginning to the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus informed those who would be His disciples that they would be both controversial and persecuted. He warned them:

Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man’s enemies will be those of his own household (Matthew 10:34-36).

Jesus wanted no misunderstanding about the trials and tribulations His followers would endure. He constantly reminded them of such (Matthew 10:16,39; 16:24; 24:9; John 15:18,20; 16:1-2; 21:18-19). While He desired that men be at peace with men, His primary goal was to bring men to a peaceful, covenant relationship with God. In addressing the Christians at Rome, Paul wrote:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?... Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:35,37-39).

Christ told His followers about the pressure that would be brought upon them by other religions (Matthew 10:17), by civil governments (Matthew 10:18), and even by some of their own (2 Thessalonians 1:4ff.). He said: “And you will be hated by all men for My name’s sake” (Matthew 10:22). History records that Christ’s words accurately described what happened to those early saints. One thing, however, was beyond doubt: those who remained faithful—even unto death if necessary—would be triumphant in the end (Revelation 2:10).

Persecution against the church was, and is, rooted in the nature and work of Christ: “But me it hateth, because I testify of it, that its works are evil” (John 7:7). The world hated Christ because of the judgment He brought against what the world is, does, and loves. It will hate those in the church who remind it—by word and by deed—of this judgment. Jesus lamented: “If the world hateth you, ye know that it hath hated me before it hated you” (John 15:18). Hatred often results in persecution. The church, if true to its mission, **will** be opposed.

HOW HUMANITY SHOULD WORSHIP GOD

In His many dealings with mankind, God always has stated that He alone is worthy to be worshipped. When He gave the Israelites the ten commandments, He reminded them of this fact when He said:

I am the Lord your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them (Exodus 20:2-5).

But it was not enough for man merely to worship God. Through the years, God provided specific instructions concerning not only the fact that He **was** to be worshipped, but also **how** He was to be worshipped. When we look in the book of Genesis, we see that God gave instructions for worship from the beginning of human history. The writer of the book of Hebrews commented on these rules by saying: “By faith, Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks” (Hebrews 11:4).

Basically, the Bible says that Abel’s worship to God was acceptable; Cain’s was not. The conclusion, therefore, is certain: Abel had obeyed whatever instructions God had given the first family regarding their worship of Him, while Cain had ignored those same instructions.

Another story in the Bible proves that God has provided precise rules for worship. In the Old Testament book of Leviticus, the story is told of two of

Aaron's sons, Nadab, his firstborn, and Abihu. Leviticus 10 explains what happened to the two boys when they tried to worship God according to their own desires, rather than as God had commanded.

Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. So fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord (10:1-2).

The key to understanding this story, of course, is in the fact that they offered “strange fire” that God “had not commanded.” Aaron's two sons suffered a horrible death because they ignored God's specific commands relating to **how** people should worship Him.

From the accounts of Cain and Abel, and Nadab and Abihu, we can learn a very important lesson regarding how God wants men to worship Him. That lesson is this: God demands **proper understanding, correct mental attitude, and reverent obedience** in matters relating to worship offered to Him! A New Testament example brings the matter more clearly into focus. In Matthew 6:1ff., Jesus condemned the Pharisees for their public display of religion when He said:

Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men.... Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.... Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

Consider the Pharisees that Christ used as an example of how **not** to worship God. They gave money; they prayed; they fasted. Under normal circumstances, would each of these acts be acceptable to God? Yes. But the Pharisees performed them for the wrong reason—“to be seen of men.” In other words, although the act itself was correct, the **purpose** and **attitude** of the Pharisees were wrong. Thus, **God would not accept their worship!**

Another point needs to be examined as well. Sincerity alone is not enough to make an act pleasing and acceptable to God. In 2 Samuel 6, the story is told of a man by the name of Uzzah who was accompanying the Ark of the Covenant of God as it was being moved from one place to another. The Ark (in violation of God's commands) had been placed on an ox cart, and the

text says simply that “the oxen stumbled” (6:6). Uzzah—no doubt believing that the precious cargo was about to fall and be damaged or destroyed—reached up to steady the Ark (6:6). But God had commanded that only certain people could touch the Ark, and Uzzah was not one of those people (Numbers 4:15). So, the moment Uzzah touched the Ark, God struck him dead (2 Samuel 6:7).

Was Uzzah sincere in what he did? Yes, he was. But his **sincerity** counted for nothing because he **disobeyed** God. Note specifically the Bible’s statement that “God struck him there for his **error**” (2 Samuel 6:7). God does not want just sincerity; He wants obedience. Jesus Himself said: “If you love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Furthermore, the way of the Lord is narrow, as Jesus made clear in His beautiful Sermon on the Mount (read specifically Matthew 7:13-14). In fact, Christ said: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

CONCLUSION

Throughout all ages, mankind has fought for freedom. Jesus came to this Earth and established the only Kingdom that is truly free. His kingdom is free from the bondage of sin, and death cannot destroy it. Jesus is a loving Lord Who wants everyone to make the decision to be a part of His kingdom. However, in order to be a member of that kingdom, we must learn to do **exactly** what God has commanded, in **exactly** the way He has commanded that we do it. Nothing can take the place of simple obedience to the law of God. Neither sincerity nor good intentions is enough. Only the person who obeys God because of a proper understanding, a correct mental attitude, and an humble spirit will be acceptable to God. Jesus loves every human being, but He will save only those people who are obedient to God’s Word and who have been added by God to the one church that Jesus bought with His blood.

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Questions—Lesson 10

TRUE OR FALSE

Write TRUE or FALSE in the blanks before the following statements.

- _____ 1. Jesus said that He would build more than one church.
- _____ 2. Jesus said that following Him always would be easy.
- _____ 3. Christianity grows best in secrecy.
- _____ 4. God does not require Christians to share their faith with others.
- _____ 5. It is impossible to be a faithful member of a denomination and a faithful member of the Lord's true church at the same time.
- _____ 6. God accepts any sincere person, even if they do not obey the truth.
- _____ 7. People never have tried to alter God's divine plan for the church.
- _____ 8. Denominationalism ignores the uniqueness of the one true church.

MULTIPLE CHOICE

Circle the correct answer(s).

- 1. Which of the following is **not** necessary in order for a person's worship to be pleasing to God?
(a) Proper understanding (b) Correct attitude
(c) Obedience (d) A big building
- 2. Which of the four men listed below worshiped God properly?
(a) Cain (b) Abel (c) Nadab (d) Abihu
- 3. Which man tried to keep the Ark of the Covenant from falling off the cart?
(a) Ahio (b) Abram (c) Uzzah (d) Nadab

FILL IN THE BLANKS

1. Jesus made it clear that there would be _____ and only one _____.
2. Sincerity _____ is not enough to make an act pleasing and _____ to God.
3. Nothing can take the place of simple _____ to the law of _____.
4. Jesus came to this Earth and established the only _____ that is truly _____.
5. _____ are man-made institutions that are neither recognized nor _____ by the Word of _____.

NOTES/COMMENTS

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