

Why A Church?

There is a scripture in the Book of Revelation which reveals the journey of a true Christian towards his or her goal. Those pictured there are present with Jesus Christ when He finally returns from heaven where He has married His bride, the true church, before the throne of His Father. (Revelation 19:6-8). The scripture I refer to is Revelation 17:14, 'These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him *are called, and chosen, and faithful.*'

Do you understand that? Jesus Christ will take as His Bride just 144,000 resurrected saints (persons) who then take their Father in Law's name as they enter finally into the family of God! Revelation 14:1, 'And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty *and* four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads.'

How awesome. How challenging, and how different from the belief that all who claim to be Christians are actually recognised by Christ, Matthew 7:13-14, 'Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it,' and also 21-23, 'Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.'

The Bride of Christ were called to become Christians or followers of God's way, were chosen by God who drew them to repentance, and then they remained faithful to that calling until their life's end. The Bible is a complex book, but we must understand that in order to comprehend any of its principles we have to draw together all the scriptures relevant to that subject, not just rely upon one or two verses. Only those diligent enough to devote time to the study of God's word can hope to become part of that firstfruit harvest at the 1st resurrection, Revelation 14:1, 4-5, 'And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty *and* four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads.' 4-5... 'These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, *being* the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God.'

Notice too that these saints were not defiled with women, which is a Bible symbol for a false church with false doctrines. They were redeemed from false teachers and purified by Christ's blood through His death. Then they remained spiritually pure by following Him exclusively. 1Peter 2:21, 'For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.'

It is a sad fact then that those who seek God have often had to escape the clutches of false teachers, Revelation 2:2, 'I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars.' Many have been so badly burned by church hierarchies and man's dominion that they resolve to avoid all groups in future and determine to make it alone. This is a mistake and a misunderstanding about just what the church is.

The church is not a building, but people, Ephesians 2: 19-22, 'Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner *stone*; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.' The Apostle Peter tells us that together we make up God's living temple or spiritual house, called to make spiritual sacrifices, 1 Peter 2:5, 'Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.' Christ is the foundation, each believer a stone. Paul portrays it as a body: Christ is the head, each believer a member of that body. Ephesians 4:15-16, 'But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.' Both pictures emphasise community. One stone by itself is useless, one body part, hopeless, without the rest.

Christ calls us to a task; together our efforts are multiplied and we learn to serve Christ and each other. Our Saviour Himself provides us with the example of regular church attendance where possible. Luke 4:16, 'And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read.' Christ also explained that large numbers are not necessary in church. Matthew 18:20, 'For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.'

Attending church can be for the wrong reasons. Some attend because they enjoy its social interaction. Others, to gain business advantages. Jesus condemned this, John 2:13-16, 'And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise.'

The Church of God exists to honour and glorify Christ, to feed the flock of God and prepare them for their future role. It provides them with the spiritual nourishment and the opportunity to serve in loving harmony while carrying forward the gospel of the Kingdom of God to the world.

Many of God's people are very isolated and widely scattered on this earth. They may be able to meet together locally, often in small groups, not always *every* seventh day because distance prohibits. Some can only get together with their brethren once a year at the Feast of Tabernacles, but where they can, meet regularly on the seventh day Sabbath, just as did Jesus Christ.

They join together in songs of praise, and learn more of God's ways from the elders in God's church. Each time they gain a glimpse of God's holiness from that teaching, it helps them to build that same character within, and prepare themselves for their role as leaders themselves, in His future Kingdom. Revelation 5:10, 'And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.' In their deep desire to follow Christ and submit to God's word they honour both Jesus Christ and their Father in heaven.

Also, each generation must prepare educated leaders to take their place, so that the world may continue to hear the gospel. The church is the training ground for this mission, just as Christ trained His disciples, 1 Peter 5:1-4, 'The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over *God's* heritage, but being ensamples

to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.'

A pastor in God's church is rather like a father in a farming family. Most farmers long for their son to take over the farm in the next generation, and gradually train him into accepting more and more responsibility, while gradually withdrawing themselves, as their son matures and can make the right decisions. So does a pastor grow his successors.

In instructing the elders about their role, the Apostle Peter was simply carrying out Christ's instruction to him, John 21:17, 'He saith unto him the third time, Simon, *son* of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.'

It is interesting to note that two Greek words are used in these scriptures for "feed", Strong's 1006 and 4165 – 1006 bosko to pasture – to fodder, graze – feed,keep

4165 pormaino – from 4166 -a shepherd, to tend as a shepherd, feed (cattle).

Both of them allude to the work of a shepherd, who, in feeding his flock, would in those days lead the sheep to different but appropriate pasture, according to their need. Thus a pastor's caring spiritual role is to guide and lead God's people in their study of God's word, according to their spiritual condition.

Jesus Christ showed us by His sacrifice that we too are called to serve. Each of us has been given different abilities or gifts, and within God's church we must find the best way to utilise what we have been given.

Ephesians 4:1-7, 'I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. *There is* one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.'

1 Corinthians 12:4-11, 'Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another *divers* kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.'

Don't be discouraged by your imperfections or fear to join in, lest you make a mistake. All God's people have problems they are working to overcome, even giants like the apostle Paul, Romans 7:14-25, 'For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that *it is* good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but *how* to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in

the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.'

As one body in Christ, if an individual stumbles, the rest of the group is there to pick him up and help him walk with his Lord again. As *part* of Christ's body, you will reflect *part* of Christ's character and do *part* of His work, but with His help you will grow to be more like Him as you become more spiritually mature.

The things you will learn in the process of helping, supporting and exhorting your brothers and sisters will prepare you for your future role as a priest/shepherd/king and example to those you are given to serve and rule in Jesus Christ's Kingdom. Revelation 20:4, 'And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and *I saw* the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received *his* mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.' Hebrews 10:25, 'Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*; but exhorting *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.'

I guess this word 'exhorting' is not all that commonly used, but that's what we more mature Christians should be about – encouraging and counselling those new in the faith, and any of our brethren struggling with a problem in their lives, to be guided by the appropriate word of God.

So, there are some conclusions we must make from the scriptures. If the present church you attend has hierarchical control (ranks) over the beliefs of its members, beware. The only Head of God's Church is Jesus Christ and he warns against our defilement by such idolatry and false doctrine. Revelation 18:4 'And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.' and 17:5, 'And upon her forehead *was* a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS [daughter churches] AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.'

Once we have escaped the religions of this world we should follow the example of the Bereans. Acts 17:10-11, 'And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming *thither* went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.' Only by closely studying the scriptures can we hope to recognise the true church among the churches of this world. 2 Corinthians 4:4, 'In whom the god of this world [Satan] hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.'

We can't afford to try to make it into God's Kingdom alone, no matter how damaged we may be by a previous church. We must recognise that Christ gave to His disciples (plural-church) a commission, Matthew 28:19-20, 'Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen.' [Please note that this is the only occurrence of this formula in the entire New Testament. All other examples of baptism take place in Jesus Christ's name. That is because originally, in the earliest Hebrew version of Matthew's gospel, no such Trinitarian words were used, and these must have been inserted later by the Roman Church].

That commission, in the broadest sense of Jesus Christ's teaching can only be carried out by a community, John 13:13-15, 'Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for *so* I am. If I then, *your* Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.' Christ came to serve mankind and by our fellowshiping together we learn how to serve, encourage and grow Christians, Hebrews 10:24-25, 'And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*; but exhorting *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.'

This is a vital practice for our future role in God's Kingdom, unattainable by those who choose to remain isolated. Only by this process can the church be sustained through the ages. Without such fellowship Christianity could not survive.

To that end Christ made the following dispositions, which we will examine in the following articles, 'Why a Pastor' and 'Why a Sermon'.

Ephesians 4:11-13, 'And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.'