



Seek The Old Paths

“Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths. . . and walk therein”
(Jeremiah 6:16)

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WORSHIPING “IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH”

Gary W. Summers

Many believe that all worship to God is accepted, but the Scriptures teach otherwise. God has no obligation to accept whatever worship is offered to Him. Worship must be according to what He desires and has asked for.

Many people do not think in terms of worshiping “in spirit and in truth.” They may wonder, “Won’t God accept any worship?” The Bible answers, “No.” The phrase under consideration is Biblical. Jesus used it in a conversation with a Samaritan woman at a well: *“But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth”* (John 4:23-24).

“IN SPIRIT”

What does Jesus mean by “in spirit and in truth?” Most scholars think that worshiping in spirit refers to fervency as opposed to cold, formalistic religion. Some religions develop rites or rituals which must be repeated even though they have, by and large, lost any meaningful purpose. Even activities that God designed to be meaningful can deteriorate. Christians who once rejoiced in being able to offer worship to God, over time, can change: the **Singing** becomes less enthusiastic. **Prayers** are uttered as if by rote (habitual repetition). The **Lord’s Supper** degenerates into a mere ceremony rather than a time for reflection on one’s sins and the greatness of the Lord’s sacrifice. **Giving**

no longer flows from a grateful heart. Many cease trying to follow the spiritual **message** being presented.

Evidently, the congregation in Ephesus had lost their enthusiasm; Jesus told them they had left their first love; they needed to repent from where they had fallen (Rev. 2:4-5). Paul expressed the problem this way in 2 Timothy 3:5; some had “a form of godliness” but denied its power. Therefore, true worshipers must have a genuine love of God and not just go through the motions.

Jesus exposed hypocrisy in the first century among the Jews. They had devised ways of trying to “get around” the command of God — particularly the one in which they were to honor father and mother (the fifth commandment God gave through Moses). What kind of person would try to circumvent God’s commandments? Not someone with a great love for Him. Jesus labeled them hypocrites, adding these words: *“This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men”* (Matt. 15:8-9).

Whenever someone’s heart is far from God, they cannot offer up true worship. Many people today have no real love of God. They would say they believe in Him, but true faith results

in obedience. James says: *“Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only”* (James 2:24). When James speaks of “works,” he does not refer to the “works of the law” (which Paul frequently wrote of); he speaks of “obedience” to God.

One can say, “I believe in God,” but such words are hollow if no obedience to Him follows. Likewise, no one can say, “I love God,” but then fail to keep His commandments. Jesus said, *“If you love me, keep my commandments”* (John 14:15). Conversely, the Lord said, *“He that loveth me not, keepeth not my sayings”* (John 14:24).

So, a person can speak about believing and loving God, but the heart can still be far from Him.

“IN TRUTH”

Fervency, therefore, is absolutely necessary. But by itself it is just as ineffective as formalism. The worshipers of Baal could become quite fanatical in their devotion. Elijah challenged Baal’s false prophets to get a response from their god (he would do likewise). They tried all day and could get no answer. Their failure did not lie in their lack of zeal. They called and called on the name of Baal. *“They leaped upon [around] the altar which*

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Worshipping...



The church of Christ is falsely accused of many things. Some of these accusations come from people simply repeating what they have heard others say — having no first hand knowledge of the church of Christ. Some comes from the prejudiced heart of individuals or perhaps from the misbehavior of church members or congregations that have stepped aside from the old Jerusalem Gospel. Some come from a misunderstanding of what the Scriptures actually teach. The church of Christ is even accused of believing and teaching doctrines that it does not believe nor teach. Our approach is simply this: What does the Bible say? What is God's will for us today?

A good way of studying the Scriptures is to see what something "is" and what it "is not." In the previous two issues we've examined what the Bible says "the church of Christ IS." Beginning with this issue we will begin to explore some things "the church of Christ is NOT."

The church of Christ is not...

A Denomination. This is perhaps the most common of all accusations leveled against the church of Christ — but it's certainly not true. It's not true just because we say we are not a denomination. It's not true because it does not fit the definition nor the description of a denomination. A denomination is defined as a "branch" of Christianity. Being a branch is only a "piece" or "part" of something that is larger. It is "one of many" — a part of a whole — as branches make up a tree. That's not a description of the church of Christ. Denominations do not make up the church we read about in the New Testament. The church of Christ is not just one of many branches which make up the system of Christianity. The church of Christ is the whole, the body of Christ, the Lord's church.

Jesus prayed for unity, not the division of denominationalism. To join

the denomination of your choice is choose division. Man's denominations are not even a part of the whole. They are distinct, separate and apart from the Lord's one true church — the church of Christ.

The Lord's prayer was that denominations would never exist. Jesus said: *"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; 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 17:20-21). These two verses show that Jesus prayed for the apostles; and, he prayed for those who would come to believe on Christ as a result of their preaching — not only in the first century, but extending to every century — as long as this world stands. He prayed that all who believe may be ONE — not dozens or hundreds. Man prays for denominations — that men may join one of their choice. But, the "good book" says, God hates those who preach and practice discord and division (Prov. 6:19)! That's exactly what denominationalism is. While Jesus prayed for unity, denominationalism promotes and glorifies division.

The Scriptures plainly declare THERE IS ONE BODY (Eph. 4:4) — not two, not hundreds, not thousands! The BODY is the CHURCH of Christ (Col. 1:18). The CHURCH is the BODY of Christ (Eph. 1:20-21). The "church" and "body" are one and the same! Since there's only ONE BODY, there's only ONE CHURCH. People often ask others what denomination they are a member of? If you understand the Scriptures, that's a very odd and nonsensical question. There's not but ONE church! You're either a member of it or you're not.

There is only ONE FAITH (Eph. 4:5). There are not many faiths that are acceptable to God and that it doesn't matter to which one you belong. Jesus did not build churches (plural) or faiths (plural). He did not say "join

the denomination of your choice" or "join the faith of your choice." He said, *"I will build MY CHURCH"* (singular, Matt. 16:18). Those who repent of their sins, confess faith in Christ, and are baptized into water for the forgiveness of their sins are added to the church by the Lord himself (Acts 2:41,47). This process is called being "born again" — being born "of water and of the spirit" (John 3:3-5). Those who do not "believe in" and "obey" Christ are not part of the Lord's church.

The world is full of denominations of every variety. Man likes to choose what he wants, so he has established churches of his own liking. An internet search declares there are as many as 45,000 denominations in the world today: Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Baptist, Apostolic, Methodist, Mormon, Jehovah's Witness — the list goes on and on and on. With man, it makes no difference to which one you belong. Pick and choose is what they say. If you don't like one, try another, and keep trying until you find one you like — there's plenty more that may suit your taste! It's eternally tragic that it never occurs to the vast majority of people to ask the simple question: "which church would the Lord choose?" He would choose his own church of course, not one made by man, using man's name, teaching man's doctrines, practicing the commandments of men.

The church of Christ is the Lord's body. Jesus only has one head and He only has one body. An animal with one head and many bodies is as freakish as an animal with many heads and one body. How foolish can people be to think it is acceptable to "join the church (denomination) of your choice?"

Man-made. Man did not establish the church of Christ, Jesus did (Matt. 16:18). Men established denominations so men could have a choice. Men don't like heaven's choice. They often say one can be saved and then can chose a denomination that suits them. Jesus does not say that. He adds those who believe and obey him to his church, not a denomination (Acts 2:41,47). When this world is over, Jesus will deliver up his church to God the Father (1 Cor. 15:24). No man-made church (denomination) will survive. Jesus is the savior of his church, not a denomination (Eph. 5:23).

Jesus spoke of John the Baptist

(Matt. 11:7-15). John came to prepare the hearts of men to receive Christ. *“And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him”* (Luke 7:24-30). Some have named their denomination after John, thinking he had a church that wore his name. However, Jesus said of him, *“Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he”* (Matt. 11:11). Jesus said the least in the kingdom — the church — is greater than John.

John the Baptist did not start the church. He was never a member of the church. He never went to church. Three years after John died, the church of Christ — the kingdom of Christ — had not yet begun. It was not established until fifty days after Jesus died and rose from the dead. It was established on the day of Pentecost when the first Gospel sermon was preached (Acts 2). All who believe and obey the Lord are added to it (Acts 2:41,47).

Of this world. When Jesus was being examined by Pilate, he asked Jesus if he was a king (John 18:33). The Lord replied, *“My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom*

not from hence. Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice” (John 18:36-37).

The Lord’s kingdom, which is the church (Matt. 16:18-19), is not “of this world.” It is a “spiritual kingdom,” not a fleshly, material kingdom. If it were a worldly kingdom Jesus said his servants would take up arms and fight like all armies of the world do. This is explained in more detail in Second Corinthians 10:3-5, *“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”* This is a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy that the Lord’s house (mountain, kingdom, church) will be made up of people from all walks of life and would be a peaceful kingdom.

Ancient Israel was accustomed to fighting wars in physical combat with spears and swords and weapons of all kinds. However, the prophet Isaiah foretold of the coming kingdom/church saying: *“...They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall*

they learn war any more” (Isa. 2:2-4; cf. Micah 4:1-4). Isaiah also spoke of the church/kingdom when he wrote these words, *“They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea”* (Isa. 11:6-9).

The church of Christ is a spiritual house/church/kingdom. Though it is “in the world,” it is not “of the world.” It is not like the armies of men and nations that extend their borders and defend their territory with carnal weapons of destruction. As Christians, our weapon is the “sword of the Spirit” — the word of God (Eph. 6:17). *“For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart”* (Heb. 4:12). The word of God has the power to convict men of their sins and can change a heart of hatred to love.

The apostle John wrote, *“If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you”* (John 15:18-19). *“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”* (Rom. 12:2).

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was made” (1 Kings 18:26). Receiving no response, *“they cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them”* (1 Kings 18:28).

Does anyone doubt their zeal? They failed because Baal was a false god who had no power. Many Muslims today are so ardent in their support of **Allah** that they will willingly give their lives, but **Allah** is not the true God. Neither is **Buddha**, nor a plethora of gods in the **Hindu** system. Now, some become squeamish at this point. Nobody likes to condemn someone else’s religion; we live in a pluralistic society — about like the first century.

The **Romans** had numerous gods and goddesses; so did the **Greeks** and various other nationalities. Even in Palestine one would find paganism, **Judaism**, and the **Samaritans** (which were a mongrel mixture). To the Romans who ruled, Caesar was Lord, but to the Jews, Jehovah was the only Lord. To Christians, Jesus was Lord. Jesus was born into a pluralistic society, but it did not keep Him from saying, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”* (John 14:6). The meaning is clear: No other religion than Jesus Christ is valid. The only way to come to the one true and living God is through Jesus. One cannot get to Him by calling on Allah, Buddha, or anyone else. God is not a pluralist.

Jesus never said, “Come to me

any way you desire to.” In our era, Jesus is the only Mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5). Did the Father himself not say that Jesus was his Son and that we must hear him? Yes, he said those words on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:5). What Jesus taught (and His apostles after him) even replaced the Law of Moses (Heb. 8:6-7) and the words of the prophets such as Elijah. They were both on the mount with Jesus. But God made it plain that Jesus is the One who now possesses his authority. After his resurrection, Jesus corroborated this fact when he said, *“All power [authority] is given to me in heaven and on earth”* (Matt. 28:18).

No matter how many religions exist on earth, God recognizes only one — Christianity. God spoke in the

days of Isaiah: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:8-9). Therefore, if the thinking of this age contradicts the words God has spoken, guess which one is incorrect? Jesus was not bashful in what he declared in John 14:6. He was also brutally frank in what he told the woman at the well. When she perceived that Jesus was a prophet, she asked a pertinent and important question of him: “Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship” (John 4:20). Jesus tells her that the time was coming when neither place will be authorized as “the location” for worship. In fact, Christians would be worshipping all over the world. This answer probably would have satisfied the woman, but just before he comments about worshipping in spirit and truth, Jesus added these words: “Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22).

One can hear a collective gasp from Oprah’s television audience upon hearing those words. Jesus told the woman that she and, by implication, the Samaritans did not know what they were worshipping. Could anyone get away with saying this today without society’s wrath coming down upon him? We can imagine the outcry: “Who do you think you are to judge some one else’s religion that way? Why, all religions are equally valid. You ought to apologize immediately and then go enroll in a sensitivity training program.” However, the Samaritan woman shows no indication of being insulted. Maybe she found it refreshing that someone would actually speak the truth to her. And certainly the Lord was not mean or vindictive in what he said; it was a truthful answer to her question, undoubtedly spoken in love. She told Jesus one thing she was sure of — that when the Messiah came, he would tell them all things. Jesus proved bold in commenting on that pronouncement: “I that speak unto thee am he” (John 4:26). Notice, He did not hedge in the slightest by suggesting that he might be the Messiah. He affirmed the truth of the matter.

She brought the city out to hear Jesus.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WORSHIP

Many believe that all worship to God is accepted, but the Scriptures teach otherwise. One need only read as far as Genesis 4 to discover that truth. Both Cain and Abel brought offerings to God; He accepted Abel’s, “But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect.” That made Cain very angry (Gen. 4:5). Cain does not ask why God refused his offering; perhaps he knew the reason — that it was not a blood sacrifice, as was Abel’s (Heb. 12:24). God asked him why he was so upset and asked him, “If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted” (Gen. 4:7)? In these few words are implied certain truths: 1) Abel had done well; he and his offering were accepted. 2) Cain had not done well; he and his offering were rejected. 3) God has no obligation to accept whatever worship is offered to Him. Worship must be according to what He desires and has asked for. Abel complied; Cain did not — instead he gave God what he wanted to give — not what God required of him.

We do not think the way God does. What is important to us may not be to him, and vice versa. He gave instructions to Israel on the way to conduct worship. The priests in particular had many instructions to keep. Nadab and Abihu apparently did not see the value of following them. They were two of Aaron’s four sons. Maybe they thought they could get by with making what (to them) might seem like a frivolous change. God had specified what fire to put in the censers they used, but they used fire from a different source. The Pulpit Commentary (2:1:149-150) suggests that, although the law had not yet been recorded, they knew the fire was to come from the brazen altar. They probably used fire from the altar of incense instead, which God had not authorized. This fire was more conveniently located, but since it was not the fire God specified, fire went out from the Lord and consumed the two brothers (Lev. 10:1-2).

Concerning worship, man is not at liberty to do what is convenient. Neither can he do what he prefers to do, as opposed to what God commands. Some violations of God’s plan for New

Testament worship include: 1) using *dramas* in place of preaching; 2) having *fund raisers* to support the church instead of the members giving as they have been prospered; 3) *reading prayers* from printed texts instead of praying from the heart; 4) *omitting the Lord’s Supper* except for a few times a year instead of observing it each Lord’s day; and 5) adding (without Bible authority) *instruments of music or hand clapping* to the singing.

If we are going to be true worshipers, we must worship “in spirit” AND “in truth” (John 4:24), which means we ought to maintain a level of enthusiasm, along with a sense of how privileged we are to worship the Almighty God who created us; and, worship him in the way he has instructed us to do it. Our fervor should be matched by our desire to make certain that we are doing what he has authorized. Only then can we be confident of blessings and rewards.

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WHAT IF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST DID NOT EXIST?

Richard Latham

*What was the end result of all the work of God,
Christ, and the Holy Spirit in the redemption of mankind?
Was it not the church? Yes.*

Paul writes concerning the church of Christ and makes clear that it did not come about by accident. It was God's plan from eternity. When the time was right, God sent his Son into the world to die for and establish the church (Gal. 4:4; Eph. 5:25) — *"To make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Eph. 3:9-11).

The question asked in the title of this lesson should help open the minds and thoughts of those who are members of the church. Whereas it would be difficult for the faithful to fathom such a thought of the church not existing, it might be easier for those who are less concerned about the will of God. The enemies of Christ would wish that the church of Christ did not exist, and the unfaithful would glory in the freedom to "do as one pleases."

When speaking of the church of Christ, it is with the understanding that Christ is the builder of the church, and the church of the New Testament is his bride (Matt. 16:13-19; Rev. 22:17). As we think about this question, let us explore some things that might not be considered by Christians or the enemies of God.

First, let me clarify that I am in no way attempting to place the church before her head, nor am I attempting to diminish from the work of God in the redemption of mankind. I ask that you ponder these questions. What was the end result of all the work of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit in the redemption of mankind? Was it not the church? Yes.

If the church did not exist, what would be the purpose of Ephesians 3:10, and what would be known "by the church" if it did not exist? If the

church mentioned in Ephesians 3:10 did not exist, how would that effect the "eternal purpose" of God (Heb. 9:14-15)? Would there be a new covenant (Matt. 26:28)? What purpose would Matthew 16:13-19 serve if the church did not exist? Would it not then indicate that if the church did not exist, then there would be no Christians, since the saved are added to the church (Acts 2:47; Acts 11:26; 1 Peter 4:16)? Who would carry out the great commission of Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-16, and Luke 24:46-49?

If the church of Christ did not exist, who would be the "salt of the earth" or "the light of the world" (Matt. 5:13-16)? Since the church of Christ was paid for by the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28), and it does not exist, then what did Christ purchase with his blood? If the church did not exist, would we have the book of Acts (book of conversions), the epistle written to various congregations of the Lord's people, the general epistles, letters to individual Christians, such as Timothy and Titus, instructing them in the church's work, worship, faithfulness, etc.

If the church of Christ did not exist, how could the book of Revelation be written to the seven churches of Asia? What about the spiritual promises to Abraham, would they exist (Gen. 12:3; Rom. 4:16; Gal. 3:16)? Once Christ died and was resurrected, then what, if the church did not come to fruition? What about the falling away and departure from the faith mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 and 1 Timothy 4:1-3? If the church did not exist, then how do you explain what they fell away from? How could some depart from it? Now, if the church did not exist and there was no falling away or departure from it, then denominationalism would not exist.

In reading J. W. Shepherd's book "The Church, The Falling Away and The Restoration" and F. W. Mattox's book "The Eternal Kingdom," along

with what our Lord taught about people teaching for doctrine the commandments of men, it is evident that there would have to be the leaving and rejecting of truth for error (John 12:48). Are we to think that such organizations who lack "salt" and "light" could ever be pleasing to God, or that a world without Christians (biblically speaking) could preserve this world?

If the church did not exist, what purpose would Daniel 2, Zechariah 1:16, Isaiah 2:2-3, and Micah 4:1-2 serve? Could man by his own righteousness preserve this world, or would there be any reason for it to be here without Christians who make up the church (Isaiah 64:6; 1 John 3:1-2)? While the enemies of God and wayward members of the church despise, ridicule, reject, and deny the church of our Lord, it would be beneficial for them to reconsider those actions. Remember, what happened when there were not ten righteous souls found in Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:32; Eccl. 5:1; Prov. 21:2)?

I know that I have not even begun to explore all the important things that are necessary to be brought out in this lesson, so it is my prayer that some of my faithful brethren would consider this topic and expound upon it. It is my belief they could do a more sufficient job than I have done. Yes, the church of Christ does exist.

For those who love God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the church, we fight every day against Satan by trying to live a faithful life unto God and convince people of the need to put away falsehood and embrace the truth. May God reward our efforts and may we receive our crown in the great judgement day. Now the question is, will you come with us?

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THE LORD'S CHOICE IN A CHURCH

Marvin L. Weir

There is a slogan that has been extremely popular for many years. In most newspapers that advertise the worship services of churches in any community, you will find these words of encouragement: **“Attend The Church Of Your Choice.”** These words please most people, and this is the primary reason they are in the paper each week. It is the “democratic” thing to do. The majority of people are happy with the slogan as they believe such a statement brings glory and honor to Christ. But does it? This is the question for us to consider as we turn to the only book that can give us a truthful answer — the Bible.

Long before the birth of Christ it was prophesied: *“in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever”* (Dan. 2:44). Jesus, during His ministry on earth, said to Peter, *“I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven”* (Matt. 16:18-19, emph. MLW). One will note that the word “church” is singular, not plural. Christ promised to build only one church — His church. Other inspired Scriptures affirm this truth. The apostle Paul notes that there is but *“one body”* (Eph. 4:4). One will also observe that the Scriptures affirm that Christ is the *“head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all”* (Eph. 1:22-23). Paul also records that Christ has promised to save only His *“body”* (Eph. 5:23).

Since God does not lie (Titus 1:2) and His Word is always true (John 17:17), let's ask some questions. If Christ were on earth today,

- 1) Would He attend His church or some man's church?
- 2) Would the Savior attend the church purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28) or one purchased with

man's money?

- 3) Would the Lord attend a church of which a man or group of men serve as its head or the one of which He is its head?
- 4) Do you believe Jesus the Christ would attend a church governed by the creeds and votes of men that continually change or the church that is governed by His Word which forever been settled in Heaven (Psa. 119:89)?
- 5) Would the Lord attend a church authorized by His Word, or a church that is authorized by man?
- 6) Does or does not the Lord's choice in a church matter?
- 7) Which church would He choose to attend?
- 8) Would Christ choose the church that wears His name and thus gives Him the honor and glory rightly His, or would He choose a church wearing a man-made name that honors a human being?

These are questions that demand serious thought, cannot successfully be ignored, and they certainly deserve an answer!

Most people choose a “church” for the wrong reason:

- 1) Some choose a particular “church” because of its beautiful architecture. We are not, however, commanded to worship the building, so this is not a valid reason.
- 2) Some choose a “church” solely because of what it can offer their children. Their children's wants and desires evidently means much more to them than the Lord's commands. They have in mind fun and games, pizza parties, ski trips, camping trips, volleyball, softball, and an appealing chauffeur (oops, youth minister) to shuttle the young folks to and from their entertainment appointments. But the truth of the matter is that the Lord's church is *not* in the entertainment and recreation business. Period! Parents should be the “youth directors,” and they are the ones responsible for all recreation and entertainment engaged in by the young people.
- 3) Some folks choose a “church” because of its size as if large numbers

are to be equated with spiritual success. The truth is that only a few were saved in the ark (1 Peter 3:20) and a few, not many, will be in Heaven (Matt. 7:13-14). Why is it so often true that numbers carry more weight with men than the Lord's will?

If one is truly interested in the salvation of his soul, he will surely desire to attend the Lord's church! One distinguishing characteristic of the Lord's church is that it was established on the Day of Pentecost in A.D. 33 as promised in Holy Scripture. Any “church” that comes into existence after A.D. 33 cannot be the Lord's church. The name (designation) **“church of Christ”** is not a man-made name but a Scriptural term (Rom. 16:16). It does not honor and glorify man. It shows ownership and gives honor and glory to the one whose blood purchased the church — the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:28).

No, the “attend the church of your choice” slogan is **not** found in the Bible! This alone should run up a red flag in a person's mind who believes in the authoritative Word of God. This slogan is the product of man's thinking and man's wisdom. One should remember Jehovah declaring, *“For my thoughts [are] not your thoughts, neither [are] your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For [as] the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts”* (Isa. 55:8-9). All roads do **not** lead to Heaven as so many believe. Jesus is very clear in declaring, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”* (John 14:6). There are not many “ways,” or many “truths.” Eternal life is found only by following the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. One cannot have it his way and the Lord's way!

Why not choose to be a member of the Lord's church that He promised to build? Obey the Gospel plan of salvation: **Hear** (Rom. 10:17), **Believe** (Heb. 11:6), **Repent** (Luke 13:3), **Confess** (Rom. 10:9-10), and be **Baptized** for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16) so that the Lord can add you to His church (Acts 2:47).

Choose the congregation of the Lord's church you attend because of people's love, reverence, and respect for the Word of God. Are you willing

to abide by the Lord's choice in a "church?" Make your choice the Lord's choice so that your soul may prosper (3 John 2)!

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LESSONS FROM THE CHURCH IN ROME

Roger D. Campbell

The members of the church in Rome had gone from being slaves, to being free people, then back to slavery again — slaves to Christ.

According to a Bible concordance I consulted, "Rome" is mentioned for the first time in the Scriptures in Acts 2 (the day of Pentecost). In total, we read about Rome in three books of the New Testament: Acts, Romans, and II Timothy.

There may have been a lot of interesting activities going on in the society of ancient Rome, but none were as important as the work and lives of the Christians who lived there. The apostle Paul penned a letter to them in about A.D. 57, saying, "To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints" (Rom. 1:7). We will use the words of that epistle to make some observations about the church in Rome.

On a personal note, the faith of the brethren in Rome was well-known. "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world" (Rom. 1:8). Without trying to impress people, it is a great thing when Christians have a faith that is recognized by others. Paul reminded the Roman saints that "the just shall live by faith" (1:17), we are "justified by faith" (5:1), God-pleasing faith is manifested as "obedience to the faith" (1:5), and the Lord expects all of us to "walk in the steps" of Abraham's faith (4:12).

The members of the church in Rome had gone from being slaves to being free people, then back to slavery again. Prior to their conversion to the Christ, they were slaves of sin. They were set free from sin's guilt when they obeyed the Gospel. Once they were in Jesus, they were slaves again: slaves of righteousness. The Holy Spirit said it this way: "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness"

(6:17-18). Let us not forget to whom we belong!

As the saints in Rome faced sufferings, tribulation, distress, persecution, and other unpleasant experiences in life (Rom. 8:18,35), they needed to recall and be grateful for just how blessed they were. In the Christ, they no longer were condemned (8:1). The sufferings of earthly life are "not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (8:18). They had a saving hope (8:24). With God on their side, no one could stand successfully against them (8:31). And, regardless of the challenges they might face in life, "Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (8:37). Rather than complain and feel sorry for ourselves, let us thank God for blessing us so much!

In some countries, there are distinct advantages for those who live in the capital city. Though there may have been some blessings attached with being a resident of first-century Rome, those followers of Jesus who lived in that immoral filth pot must not allow themselves to become conformed to the world. They were instructed: "...present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..." (12:1-2). As we live in a world filled with darkness, we must not be lovers or imitators of it.

The Christians in Rome were duty-bound to "be subject to the governing authorities" of the Roman Empire (Rom. 13:1), yet their highest obligation was to the Lord of heaven and earth. Their God was not Caesar, but the Creator, Who alone is "the God of patience and comfort" (15:5), "the God of hope" (15:13), and "the God of peace" (15:33).

The sisters and brothers in Rome, rather than focusing on their own rights and desires, needed to care about what was best for the church. As citizens in God's kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy (14:17), they were charged: "Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another" (14:19). Every local church of the Christ is blessed when its members make spiritual edification a top priority.

To preserve its stability and spiritual well-being, the church in Rome needed to note and avoid divisive disciples and doctrinal departures from the faith (Rom. 16:17-18). The Bible's language is: "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple."

At least some of the saints in Rome were part of a congregation in the house of Aquila and Priscilla (Rom. 16:3-5). "House churches" (the church in one's house) were the norm in the first century. Assembling in the home of a Christian family promotes personal interaction with other saints, giving brethren the chance to build one another up and have a sense of being a close-knit family. Not to mention the potential for great singing!

The last chapter of Romans includes numerous greetings from Paul and others to the brethren in Rome. Over thirty Christians are named. Which of them were unimportant? None! Which had the hope of heaven and a role to play in the church? Every single one! We look forward to meeting them one day.



SEEK THE OLD PATHS

“I want to commend you on your ‘WOKE’ articles in *Seek The Old Paths*

[March & April, 2022] Good job! It’s sad how this world is going”

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...**Lynda Overton, Dickson, TN** [Sorry for your loss]. “This contribution is in memory of LeRoy Hudson who was a brave and faithful soldier in both the Lord’s army and the United States of America. LeRoy was a preacher in many congregations of the Lord’s church, the latest being the Blanchard C/C in Blanchard, Louisiana. He also was an instructor in several Christian schools. Rest in peace, brother LeRoy”

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...**Homer Bradshaw, Camden, AR.**

Lost Opportunities: We must stay alert to opportunities because as we have opportunity to do good, we should (Gal. 6:10). Fear is one reason people fail to grasp their opportunities. Some hesitate to obey the Gospel, some too long, because they are fearful they will not be faithful. We don’t know how long Agrippa hesitated in obeying the Gospel. Indications are he never obeyed. “*Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds*” (Acts 26:28-29). Some hesitate in financial opportunities until they are gone. Some postpone schooling or marriage until they think everything is just right, but when things get ‘just right’ the opportunities are no longer there. Caution and fear are not the same. Colossians 4:5 says, “*Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.*” Opportunities abound all around us but we often fail to see them. We are to use every moment, using our time wisely. We often put off till tomorrow what we could do today. But, we may never see tomorrow, or tomorrow may not come at all. “*Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth*” (Prov. 27:1).

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