

### Where Is God's True Church?

Where is God's church today? You've learned that most churches today are actually churches following traditions of men and doctrines of Satan; but where is GOD's church?

We know He built it; for He promised, saying *"I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"* (**Matthew 16:18**). He promised to build His church, THEREFORE HE BUILT IT! And we know it still exists today, for He said *"the gates of death shall not triumph over it"* (**Matthew 16:18, Murdoch**).

Furthermore, we know there is only ONE true church; for **Jesus didn't say "I will build my CHURCHES"!** He said *"I will build my CHURCH"*! So we know He built only ONE true church, and we know that church still exists somewhere today. But where is it? How could you recognize that one church Jesus built? Where can you find it? How can you join it?

Among the multiple thousands of churches dotting the landscape today, claiming to be "Bible" churches, which one is the church Jesus built, and how can you know? Every church claims to love the Bible. Every one claims to know the true Jesus. They all claim to be the true guardians of pure apostolic Christianity. Most believe they are the one-and-only-true-Church-Of-God. Which one is right and how can you know?

The answer to this is really quite simple; ignore what men say and simply believe what Jesus said; believe the Bible. His words will point you directly to His one and only true church. You only need to believe Him instead of men.

Most people just attend the same church they grew up in, assuming either they were blessed to be raised in God's one-and-only true church... or all these other churches are right too, and as long as they "confess Jesus" and "love people" they'll all go to heaven anyway.

If a person is uprooted from their church for whatever reason, they usually choose a new one based on how "loving" the people appear to be, how nice the music service is, and whether they have a good youth program. Are those the criteria found in the Bible?

We have been taught to think of a church as a building with a big cross on top, where people gather on Sundays for fellowship, music and worship. Is that what the Bible says? How does the Bible say you should choose a church? And which of the thousands of churches out there is the TRUE church? That's...

### LESSON 26: WHERE IS GOD'S TRUE CHURCH?

By a simple process of elimination, you have already learned that most of the world's churches cannot possibly be God's true church; any church having the mark of the beast, for example, cannot be God's church (**Revelation 14:9-11, 15:2**). God's true church does not have this mark – so any church who worships on Sunday cannot be God's true church. That alone eliminates 95% of all churches.

Another simple fact that eliminates most of the rest is the keeping of God's commandments. Immediately following the verses you just read in **Revelation 14** where the false church is pictured worshipping the beast, the true church is contrasted in **verse 12**; showing us that the TRUE saints keep God's commandments! (See also **Revelation 12:17**).

They keep ALL the commandments of God – including not only the Ten Commandments, but also unclean meats, the holy days, tithing, and even turning the other cheek. The true Christian church lives by EVERY word of God! (**Matthew 4:4**). **So already at least 98% of churches, including very likely the one you've been attending, are certainly not God's true church.**

You can add another percent and a large fraction very easily by applying the test of antichrist; do they believe that Jesus was literally human, tempted in ALL POINTS like you and I are? Did the desire to sin ever exist in Jesus – a desire which He conquered as you and I must? Did He come to Earth with a carnal human nature? If a church does not believe this, John says they are antichrist (**1 John 4:1-3**). He also said there were, *even then*, MANY antichrists! (**1 John 2:18**).

Just by applying these three tests – a mere fraction of what you've learned – practically every church out there is eliminated. And yet God said the true church would be built and would never cease to exist! So where is it?

## HOW MANY CHURCHES ARE THERE?

Did Christ say He would build His churches? **Matthew 16:18**. Is the church the bride of Christ? **2 Corinthians 11:2**. How many brides will Jesus marry at His return? **Revelation 19:7**. Is the church the symbolic body of Christ? **Colossians 1:18**. Is Jesus the head of that body? **Ephesians 5:23**. How many bodies is He the head of? **Colossians 3:15**. How many bodies are there? **Ephesians 4:4**.

There is only ONE church. One body of Christ, one bride that He will marry at His return. Now you've already eliminated nearly all churches by comparing their beliefs and practices to the Bible. Still, somewhere out there is the true church. But before we can find it, we have to examine a few myths people believe about churches.

## NOT A BUILDING

The Bible NEVER speaks of a church as a building, or being attached in any way to a building. The disciples usually met in people's houses – read **Acts 2:2**, **Acts 16:32**, **Romans 16:3-5**, **Colossians 4:15**, **Philemon 1:2**. Notice there was a church which met IN THAT HOUSE. But the house wasn't holy, nor was it a special "house of God". It was just a meeting-room. Sometimes church services were even held outdoors! (**Acts 16:13**).

Since the destruction of the temple at Jerusalem, there has never been a SINGLE building that was called the house of God. More about that later.

## NOT FOR FELLOWSHIP

Fellowship is NEVER spoken of in context with a church service. Everyone takes it for granted that fellowship happens at church. Do a Bible search for "fellowship". Read every place the word is used. You'll find we have fellowship with God, shouldn't have fellowship with Satan, and should have fellowship with other believers; but it is *never* mentioned in connection with going to church!

What you will learn is we have fellowship any time we follow the command in **Malachi 3:16**. The word fellowship has no particular connection with going to church.

## YOU CANNOT JOIN GOD'S CHURCH

You cannot join God's true church, and the book of enrollment for that church is not kept on Earth! This is a shock to most people, for today people join churches like they join any worldly club – they pay their dues, perhaps go through an initiation ritual, and sign their name on the book of membership. Possibly they even take an oath of allegiance.

But God's church isn't some worldly club men join, based on their feelings, or join at their convenience. God's church is unique! God alone chooses its members! Can you join God's true church? **John 6:65**. Can ANYONE come to Jesus – become a part of His bride – without the Father first CALLING him? **John 6:44**.

You can sign your name on every membership book in every church on Earth, go to church every day of the week, but no matter what you do, you CANNOT find Jesus unless the ability is GIVEN to you by God! Unless God PERSONALLY draws you to Him, you CANNOT come to Jesus and receive salvation and eternal life!

You studied that at length in Lesson 19, but when searching for God's true church you must remember *it only consists of those whom God has called*. God must CALL you to Himself for you to receive the promises you've read in these lessons. The random man on the street cannot just pick up a Bible and decide to devote his life to God. Oh, he can try – but without God's guidance, he'll end up as just another false Christian (**Philippians 2:13**).

God must be actively and PERSONALLY involved in your salvation. The desire to follow Jesus and the ability to understand His message must be GIVEN to each and every one of us before we can join the church of God.

Who adds people to the church? **Acts 2:47**. Men don't add people to the church! Men don't call people; bring them to the understanding of the truth. At best, we are tools used for that purpose. GOD, and GOD ALONE, adds to the church those people who should be saved!

### BUT WHAT IS A CHURCH?

The word translated “church” in your Bible is the Greek *ekklesia*, which you may recognize in words borrowed from Latin like *ecclesiastical*. According to Strong's Greek Lexicon, it literally means “a calling out”; thus, those in an *ekklesia* – a church – would be “the called-out ones”.

But called out of what? **John 15:19**. Are you a part of the world anymore? **John 17:16**. Because you are not of the world, will the world hate you? **Verse 14**. Who gave these “called-out ones” to Christ? **Verse 6**. Did Jesus pray for the rest of the world, or ONLY for these called out ones? **Verse 9**.

God calls us out of the world; **at that point, we become the *ekklesia* – the church. That is the literal meaning of the word.** God said He would build His church – what that literally means is God promised He would call out of the world people to be His.

Who is the head of this church? **Ephesians 5:23**. Who puts you in the church of God? **Acts 2:47**. Where are your names written on the book of membership? **Luke 10:20**. Who is written in heaven? **Hebrews 12:23**.

In the broadest sense, THE church of God is not an organization. It is not a group that meets on Saturday. It's not associated with a building, a man, nor is it broken up by country or region. There is one church; **that church is composed of every single person on this Earth who is led by the spirit of Christ.**

*Ekklesia* – church – means “called out ones”. The true church of God includes EVERY “called-out” person on Earth! Whether they know each other, like each other, or even speak the same language. Thus, there is only ONE true church and it knows no boundaries. Jesus is its head, no man is.

What about all the different churches mentioned in the Bible? What about the church of God in Judea, Corinth, or the churches in Asia? Here is the Bible name for those churches: **1 Corinthians 1:2, Acts 8:1, Romans 16:1**, etc. Notice they all have one name – the church of God. All the same church!

When there are enough called-out people in a certain area, they can and must assemble together – see **Hebrews 10:25**. This becomes the church of God AT Corinth; not a separate church! But a local assembly of the SAME church. Not a church with different beliefs, for there is only one truth. These churches may or may not be connected by a common teacher or apostle. They may or may not send their tithe money to the same person. **But if they are the true church of God, they are brothers in Christ and will behave accordingly.**

*(NOTE: God's name for His true church has nothing in common with the modern corporate “Church Of God” you see in many towns. That, like most other churches, is merely an institution that teaches doctrines of men, not doctrines of the Bible. Without exception, when I use the term “church of God” I am ALWAYS referring to it in the pure Biblical sense you just studied).*

## A LITTLE FLOCK

God never said He would build great cathedrals for this church. He never said they would be a great political power. He never said they would number in the billions. He said only that He would build an *ekklesia* – a group of called-out people – and no power in Heaven or Earth would be able to destroy it.

Is God's church the majority? **Matthew 7:14**. How large is His true flock? **Luke 12:32**. Especially in these end times, did Jesus wonder if there would be ANY who would still be faithful? **Luke 18:8**. How many people does it take to be considered “a church”? **Matthew 18:20**.

Any two people, with whom God is working, who gather together in a basement or a bus station or under a tree to discuss God are an *ekklesia* and God promises to be in the midst of them. It's that simple. You don't need a priest, a building, or a complicated order of services, songs, prayers, and rituals. **You need two people whom God has called and a Bible, and you have a church.**

There may be millions of such “church services” taking place every Sabbath around the globe – or you may be the only one alive doing it. But Jesus has sworn that His church will never cease to exist, and as long as two people with His spirit get together to read and discuss the Bible, it won't.

Of course, true churches can get much larger than this; and when they do get larger, there is a need for some structure and ultimately, some government and authority in the church. But that's a large subject for another lesson. For now let's stick to the church as it was in the early times of apostolic purity, when it most closely approached God's ideal.

## THE CHURCH IN THE WILDERNESS

Few people realize it, but there was a church in the Old Testament as well. It's mentioned in **Acts 7:38**. The same Greek word *ekklesia* meaning “called out”. And why not? Was Israel “called out” by God? **Hosea 11:1**. This prophecy was dual, actually triple, for it was fulfilled in **Matthew 2:15** when Jesus was called back out of Egypt where He was hidden from Herod.

But it's also a prophecy of us, who are all called out of spiritual Egypt – remember, **Egypt always symbolically represents sin or the land/dominion of sin in the Bible**. So in a sense ancient Israel, Jesus, and the NC saints are all “called out ones”, and thus all part of an *ekklesia* – a church of God.

However, we are not part of the SAME church. The church in the wilderness was called out of literal Egypt, given the OC, and formed an OC *ekklesia*. You might say it was a *physical* or *civil* church, as opposed to a spiritual church. But that church wasn't good enough, as Stephen went on to say in **Acts 7:39-41**.

It not only didn't live up to God's hopes (for reasons explained in Lesson 21: The Covenants), it actually *fell away* from God and began serving other gods – see **verses 42-43**. Remember, the goal of salvation is to make a house for God – a temple that God could be comfortable dwelling in (**1 Corinthians 3:16-17**).

But these people in this OC church rejected God and denied Him access to their hearts, so He could not dwell in them. So He had them build Him a physical tabernacle to appear in, so He could give instructions to them through Moses since they wouldn't take direct instruction from Him (**Acts 7:44**). They brought this “house of God” with them into the Promised Land (**verse 45-46**), where Solomon built a more permanent version (**verse 47**). (Note that “Jesus” in **verse 45** refers to Joshua, not to Christ.)

God appeared to some of their leaders and prophets in this physical house (**2 Chronicles 6:36-40**), and prayers made to it by a *physical* people were more likely to be heard because it was the house of God. But this was a mere physical symbol, not God's ideal – for God fills the heavens, and you can hardly cram Him into a tiny building (**Acts 7:48-50**).

But now in the NC God has a BETTER building. A temple made “without hands” (**Mark 14:58**), which is begun with our baptism (**Colossians 2:11-15**), and now WE are that temple. It isn't in any building, we pray facing no

particular direction, and there is no special sanctuary of God on Earth *except in the hearts of every true Christian*.

Those “habitats” for God constitute the true church, within whom God dwells. Israel was the OC church of God because God lived in the tabernacle or temple in the midst of the body of their nation. Jesus was a temple of God because God dwelt in Him. And we are the NC church of God because God lives in the midst of our body. And as long as God maintains a presence in this temple, we are the light of the world.

## CAN A CHURCH FALL AWAY?

Churches are composed of people – whether 2 people or 2 million, they’re just groups of people. And as you learned in Lesson 20, many are called – many hear of the church or its doctrines. Few are chosen – few actually are baptized and become a part of the church. And fewer still remain faithful.

Let’s look at a few specific examples of churches of God that fell away from the truth. Let’s start with Ephesus. Ephesus was, overall, a pretty good church. Paul raised up the church there (**Acts 18:19-20**), and spent three years personally leading it (**Acts 19:1-10** and **Acts 20:31**). Yet he knew when he left, the church would gradually fall away from the truth he had taught them (**Acts 20:17-35**). What did he say would cause this? **Acts 20:29-30**.

About 35 years later, after Paul’s predictions had a chance to come to pass, God addressed the same church at Ephesus through John in **Revelation 2:1-7**. There, He told them to remember the original understanding and obedience they had abandoned, and repent. And He warned them if they didn’t, He would remove their candlestick.

**Revelation 1:20** defines a candlestick as a church. God was threatening Ephesus that if they didn’t repent and “do the first works”, He would remove their “church” from them. How is that possible? If they ARE the church, how can God *remove* their church? **Easy. They can continue being a CHURCH, but if God removes their candlestick they cease to be a true church of God and become just another FALSE CHURCH.**

We see an actual example of this happening in **3 John 1:9-10**. There was a church assembling in some city, where a disciple named Gaius lived (**verse 1**). This church, which no doubt had been raised up by the apostles or their disciples, had started following a man named Diotrephes – one of those “grievous wolves” Paul warned the Ephesians about who would be “*speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them*”.

This man was not only leading the church away from truth, but he was putting people who stood up for the truth out of the church – and forbidding those who remained from associating with those true brethren. **I ask you, is it possible that what began as a true church of God is STILL a church of God after all the true brethren are cast out of it?**

Can a group of people who stay behind just because it was once a church of God, or because they are too timid to object, or too frightened to stand alone against a false ministry be considered true Christians? No matter how loving or pleasant they might seem to be, can any people who choose convenience, habit and comfort over truth be true Christians? Can a people who choose a false minister over true brethren be true brethren themselves? John answers in **3 John 1:11**.

There are many other examples of churches that fell away from the truth in **Revelation 2-3**. These chapters also have a dual meaning, as God says in **Revelation 1:11, 19**. These are things which ARE (things which were literally happening at the time it was written) and things which SHALL be (prophecies of things which would happen over the coming centuries). But for now, we’re only interested in the things which ARE (or *were*, from our point of view). The literal meaning of these verses. The rest is, you guessed it, another lesson.

## HOW APOSTASY HAPPENS

Apostasy is just a fancy word that means “falling away from truth”. How does that happen? How does a church go from being an excited, zealous, obedient church of God to a degenerate church serving that “other Jesus”?

Let's start back at the OC church; the wandering in the wilderness was a more or less constant battle of wills between the rebellious people and God; but for the most part, Moses kept them in line. When he knew he was about to die, what did he tell them? **Deuteronomy 31:27-29**. What happened every time the judge (civil leader) died in Israel? **Judges 2:19**.

There are several reasons for apostasy. Usually it is a combination of all of them, but the first and easiest to explain is simply the leader dies – as Jesus explains in **Matthew 26:31**. When the shepherd dies, the church inevitably splinters. Whether the shepherd was Jesus, Moses, a judge, a king, an apostle, or any other person who guided the church and kept it in line – when they die, the church will change. That is simply a fact of life.

Even if they don't die, but just leave the area for an indefinite amount of time like Paul left Ephesus, the church will inevitably change. Peter was aware of this as well, that after his death the church would splinter. He tried to leave instructions to hold it together, but he knew he couldn't prevent it. Start reading in **2 Peter 1:13-19**.

In this, Peter says he knows he is going to die, and tells them how he learned these things, in an effort to give them a reason to listen to him. Now skip ahead to **2 Peter 2:1-2**. Peter, like Paul and Moses and all the wise leaders in the Bible, knew that after his death "*there shall be false teachers among you... denying the Lord that bought them... and many shall follow their pernicious ways*".

**Peter knew that men like Diotrephes would come into the church after his death!** And he was cautioning them about it, so they would be on their guard *and it happened anyway!* Look at his very first warning for a clue to how these false teachers work. Back up to **2 Peter 1:20**, and continue reading to **2 Peter 2:3**.

The main way false teachers work is to make scriptures "*of a private interpretation*". In other words, they have "secret" or "advanced" knowledge regular members can't have. They understand the Bible in a way that you, who are not one of "God's ministers", simply can't understand. They tighten church authority – the details of which you will study in another lesson – and increasingly encourage the membership to depend on the judgment and teaching of the ministry. And always, many will follow them. A few won't.

## WHY DO THEY BECOME FALSE TEACHERS?

In some cases, false teachers are just what they sound like; people who never did understand or love the truth, and always had false motives. But most of the time, they initially loved the truth, but then were seduced by fame, money, or power and gave up what little truth they understood and became false teachers.

A good example of this is Simon Magus. What was his occupation? **Acts 8:9-11**. He was in high regard in the community, a great magician. When he heard the gospel, did he initially believe it? **Verses 12-13**. Later, when he saw the power – to him, magic – the apostles had, what did he do? **Verses 18-24**.

Simon was accustomed to the admiration and respect of the community because of his magic tricks. He was a person of importance, and he no doubt liked that position of power! But when he heard the gospel, he believed it! Then when he saw a way to twist this gospel to his own ends and use the power of God to restore himself to power in the community again, *he jumped on it*. Why? Because as Peter told him "*thy heart is not right in the sight of God*".

Most false ministers are the same; initially they have the best intentions, believe the gospel and are genuinely sincere in their desire to serve God and help people. But sooner or later, they are faced with hard choices; teaching hard truths might cost them their entire congregation, their money, their livelihood, their respect.

So do they trust God and speak the unadulterated truth, or do they soften it – just a bit – because "it's better to stay so they can at least do SOME good than to lose their flock and not be able to help anyone!" Thus is born a false teacher. **Truth cannot be sacrificed for any man, any group of men, nor even for God Himself (Galatians 1:8). If God sins against His own law, you had better be prepared to tell Him so (Genesis 18:25, Job 13:8-10).**

**Truth is truth. If you change, soften, or twist it in any way, FOR ANY REASON, you help Satan in his fight to water down the truth of God (Jeremiah 48:10).**

## THE REAL REASON FOR APOSTASY

It is true the ministry is to blame for what happens to their flock. And it is true when the leader dies or falls away from the truth himself the flock usually withers. But that isn't the reason why the apostasy happened in the first place.

What is the real reason for apostasy? **2 Timothy 4:3-4**. Who plugged up the ears of the people? **Zechariah 7:9-13**. Why did they get deceived by the corrupt ministry? **2 Thessalonians 2:10-12**. Why did God allow them to be exposed to deception in the first place? **1 Corinthians 11:19**.

**Many of the most troublesome questions in the Bible are answered by that series of scriptures.** Yes, Diotrephes came in and spread heresies into that church **but the people tolerated it**. No, the people ENCOURAGED it, or he would never have been able to rise to a position of such power! The people "*heaped to themselves teachers*", and "*would not hear sound doctrine*"!

They STOPPED their ears from hearing the words of the apostles, *because they didn't love the truth*. So God sent them a delusion – a man like Diotrephes – so they would believe his lies and be deceived. So they could still have a chance at salvation in the second resurrection, as you've studied so many times.

Do people like false prophets? **Jeremiah 5:31**. Do people speak well of false prophets and ministers? **Luke 6:26**. How do the PEOPLE instruct their teachers and ministry? **Isaiah 30:9-10**. Why? **John 3:20-21**. A true minister REPROVES sin! He CORRECTS people who break the commandments! Why did the world hate Jesus? **John 7:7**.

How ironic that the world today believes the exact opposite about Jesus! They believe He would NEVER condemn someone's sin, no matter how rebellious! But the world hated Him because He was *not* afraid to testify that their works were EVIL! Do false prophets correct sin and show why people are suffering? **Lamentations 2:14**. What do they promise them? **2 Peter 2:18-19**.

Don't get me wrong, the ministry who leads a church away will receive a harsh punishment **but ultimately the blame falls on the shoulders of the people in the church who "love to have it so"**. **On the people who refused to hear the law, and preferred "smooth things", pleasant, uplifting sermons rather than sermons that CORRECTED THEIR SIN.**

Who wouldn't prefer to hear that God loves them as they are, instead of hearing God is angry with them for their sins? **TRUE CHRISTIANS! True Christians would ALWAYS prefer to be corrected than to hear empty (and untrue) sermons about how wonderful they are!** There is a simple truism that you will never break: **a church full of true Christians will not follow a false minister.**

## WHY GOD ALLOWS DECEPTION

In any given local church, there are always varying levels of conversion. Some are sincere; some less so, some are in church for completely wrong reasons such as those in **Galatians 2:4** and **Philippians 1:15-18**. Read the parable of the tares in **Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43**. A "tare" is a worthless plant that looks very similar to wheat when it grows, and crowds out the useful crops. The point of the parable is some are sincere – the wheat – and some are sown there by the devil in an attempt to corrupt and choke out the true Christians.

Jesus commands us NOT to try to root out and pluck up the tares, lest we accidentally pull up true Christians at the same time – since we, being human, can't always tell the difference. Why would God allow tares – false Christians – to infiltrate His true church? Simply to see who loves truth and who will allow themselves to be deceived by their sweet lies.

God can see the hearts of those in the church, and knows there are many who are not receiving a love of the truth and understanding it. So to make this obvious even to us, God exposes them to deception. Why? "*for there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you*" (**1 Corinthians 11:19**). **In other words, God sends deception so those who are true Christians will stand out from the rest!**

When a tare enters a church – or when a true Christian falls away and becomes a tare – they start chipping away at the foundations of truth and arguing for softer teaching, minor changes in the nature of God, always in the name of “love” and “worship”. Now one of two things can happen:

1. In a powerful church with a majority of sincere believers, the true Christians are on their guard for this and immediately point out the error. Every time the tare tries to soften the truth, they immediately argue him down.

Eventually, he will be so uncomfortable staying in a church with a belief system he now hates and can't change, that he will leave the church, possibly to start his own group – usually taking a few of the weaker members with him. These were those who were “not approved”, and were now “made manifest”.

The true church remains clean, and now there is just another false church out there starting its long journey of deception back to Catholicism.

2. On the other hand, in a dying, corrupt church with many weak members, this tare finds a happy home and eager ears, and gradually corrupts many teachings and acquires a large following in the church and rises in power. Finally he becomes a Diotrephes, and pushes out the true brethren. God removes the candlestick and it becomes just another false church. The true brethren, if any, now have ironclad proof the people they thought were brethren were in fact all tares.

Those are really the only two options. There **MUST** be heresies in the church. There **MUST** be deception; there **MUST** be leaven and tares. So that God can continually divide the true brethren from the false. You must love the truth to resist this process for a lifetime and remain faithful in the face of constant deception. But that's the whole point – so those who are approved might be made manifest.

The few people who understand this phenomenon at all always put all the blame on the ministry for leading the flock astray. And as I said above, they are worthy of blame (**Matthew 18:7**)! But **the TRUE blame is on the people**. God will not let Satan deceive anyone who hasn't already rejected many important truths of God on his own.

Read **Hosea 4:6**. This is a very important verse, because it is addressed to the would-be saints! It is because **THEY** rejected HIM, that He will reject them (and send them a strong delusion to believe a lie). And when that happens, *they will not become priests of God – the goal of the first resurrection!*

If they had not “stopped their ears” when God spoke to them, God would not have “stopped His ears” when they spoke to Him (**Zechariah 7:13**).

## THE BEAUTY OF THAT PROCESS

This seems like a rather depressing topic, especially when you see these things happening to a person or an entire church firsthand, as I have. But it is only depressing until you truly grasp the beauty of it. Those people have gained everything, and lost nothing. Those people who were deceived by the devil or his ministers and led away into a false Christianity *were deceived by God for their own good*.

If God had not intervened, if He had kept pouring understanding into their rebellious spirits *they would eventually have become so evil there would have been no hope for their salvation in the second resurrection*. So He “*delivered them unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*” (**1 Corinthians 5:5**).

These people were called. They were perhaps even chosen, and faithful for a time; but this life is a testing process for the rulers of the World Tomorrow. It is the way God makes certain those whom He puts in power in His Kingdom will not turn into immortal Diotrepheses (Diotrephes's? Diotrephes'? Diotrephi?) armed with the power of God.

Had they not been called, they'd have wound up in the second resurrection with the rest of the world. As it is, they had a chance at truth, had a chance to reject it and did so, and now they'll still wind up in the second



resurrection with the rest of the world. Perhaps slotted a bit lower because they did have a chance in this life *but eventually that would have happened anyway*. *Water always finds its own level*.

**They really haven't lost anything. God offered them an opportunity, they failed, and they missed an opportunity to be a firstborn child of God but that's all.** The second resurrection isn't such a bad place. When you see someone deceived by God, rather than weeping for their lost salvation, rejoice for the mercy of God that protected them from their own rebellious nature.

## SO WHY DID GOD INVENT THE CHURCH?

The church is obviously a poor tool for spreading the truth. So why did God use it? Why did He use the "foolishness of preaching" to spread the gospel? **1 Corinthians 1:21**. He did it to save those – **and only those – who believe!**

Try to always bear in mind that God could "save" billions by simply revealing Himself to the world and commanding them in a deep, resonant voice to obey Him. But it would be obedience out of FEAR, and obedience to the LETTER of the law, and not a CHOICE to obey the SPIRIT of the law like you and I have made!

The "foolishness" of the church is an excellent way to make that happen. Just as the Old Covenant was not flawed, so likewise the NC church is not flawed in and of itself. Just like the OC, the NC church would have produced wonderful fruit *IF it had ever been given a chance to fulfill its purpose*. But the fault in the NC church, just as in the OC church, was found with the people.

God had two purposes in creating the church. An "ideal" purpose that would have been amazing *if men weren't so carnal*, and a "realistic" purpose that God actually expected to happen. First, let's look at the ideal in **2 Timothy 2:1-2**.

**Jesus came and committed the truth to twelve faithful men.** He did a good job, as is to be expected, and only one fell away. Each of those was to take that truth and commit it to other faithful men; say, another dozen. Each of those in turn was to do the same and "teach others also" (**2 Timothy 2:2**). It is easy to see in multiplying the number of faithful men by twelve every few years, very soon the church would have covered the Earth.

This is what could have happened, had Jesus remained as a visible head of the church, managing it and keeping the church clean first-hand. And it's what will happen when He IS running the Kingdom (**Isaiah 2:3**). Basically, the church would be set up like a pyramid scheme, only with men instead of money. In this way, the church could have fulfilled Jesus' command in **Matthew 28:19-20**.

But back to reality. That didn't happen because the church was run by men. Well-intentioned men, but fallible, frail, weak men. They allowed compromise and sin to creep into the church, and because of this, God's original ideal could not happen. Of course God certainly knew it wouldn't happen, but it is still the ideal that we must work towards. When you are trying to decide what to do, **remember that goal!**

## THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH

**Galatians 4:22-31** speaks of two covenants, the old and the new; and it compares the people under these covenants to children of two mothers, Hagar and Sarah. As you learned earlier in this lesson, each covenant had a group of people in it, which collectively made a church. In a symbolic sense, the church of God is the mother of all the people under the NC.

Initially, most people hear of the truth through the church, or come to the church shortly after learning it. And initially, they can learn a great deal from the church. But the church is the beginning of their life, not the end! Eventually they've learned all the truth the church has to offer, and it's time to go beyond the church, venture away from Mommy's skirts, and take on the real world. This will probably take a few years, just as it takes a few years for a toddler to walk and another few years for them to start going to school without their mothers.

It might take a decade or two of that before they are ready for total autonomy and independence *but that is clearly the goal of every human child*. And that is the purpose of “*committing these things to faithful men... who shall be able to teach others...*” – The creation of independently righteous truth-seekers, who stand for the truth with or without the support of a nurturing church.

This doesn't mean you “leave” the church in the sense most people do, but simply that you grow beyond the church and are no longer *dependent upon it*. Your life, your salvation, your soul is not connected to the church. If the entire church starts worshipping Baal, that's their problem. You simply stop attending with them and move on with your life.

And while you may feel sad or regret their decision *it won't feel as if your heart was ripped out because you no longer depended on your mother for food, shelter, and happiness!* Your salvation depended upon your relationship with GOD, not on your relationship with your church.

When you reach that point, you will be a mature Christian – and that should be the goal of the church, as it should be the real goal of ANY good mother (**Genesis 2:24**). INDEPENDENTLY MOTIVATED RIGHTEOUSNESS – should be the goal of every parent for every child, because that is the goal of Almighty God for every child of His!

## WHAT GOD KNEW WOULD HAPPEN

Unfortunately, that has almost never happened. The church initially has the best intentions, but like most mothers it always clings to its children long after they should have been encouraged to explore beyond the nest. The inevitable result is a church full of sissified mama's boys, so dependent on the church for guidance they will literally sell their souls to stay close to her.

The church which was supposed to teach you about God gradually ECLIPSES God without anyone realizing it. Gradually the ministry who was supposed to teach you how to follow God yourself, starts telling you “follow me, and I'll lead you to God”.

The ministry who was supposed to teach you how to make your own decisions, gradually takes more and more of that responsibility away from the people until the people can't decide whether they can go swimming on the Sabbath without consulting a minister.

The church which was supposed to teach you how to “*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*” (**Philippians 2:12**), tells you to pay and pray and leave your salvation in their capable hands. Of course it isn't put in those words, and it's done so subtly that you don't notice it until one day you look around and wonder what happened to the church you once loved.

All of these things have happened to every church God has ever built, without exception. Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah, Moses, the first century church – and thousands of times since – God gives one or several men a great deal of understanding, He uses those men to build a church which does great things. But over time, as the zeal of the church wanes and sin and compromise creep in, so do the things you just read.

**And that corruption in the church serves God's purpose just as much as the initial building of the church did!**

Many people would follow God if there was a powerful, charismatic, heroic man to lead them. Even ancient Israel was willing to follow Moses (**Exodus 20:19**). But the problem is, once they get comfortable following him, **they will follow that man into righteousness OR into sin!**

They will surrender their consciences to the church leadership and follow them unquestioningly, whether Moses leads them to God or Aaron leads them to the golden calf! An excellent example is Hezekiah. After an INCREDIBLE renaissance of truth in Israel under Hezekiah, Israel was so joyously serving God that they kept unleavened bread TWICE in a row, and there was great joy among all of them! (**2 Chronicles 30:21-31:1**). And afterward they went through the land and destroyed the idols of the pagan gods! They were happy to follow Hezekiah into righteousness!

...but a mere 25 years later, **these same people** followed the next king, Manasseh, into serving false gods again! (**2 Chronicles 33:1-9**). The point is that these people were not following GOD! They were following a KING! Ancient Israel wasn't following GOD; they were following MOSES (or Aaron, when Moses wasn't around).

In the first century, the church John wrote to in **3 John** wasn't following God, they were following the MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH! Otherwise, they would never have followed Diotrephes when he led them away from God, nor would they have chosen him over the true brethren!

## THE POINT

God doesn't want you to shift your unquestioning allegiance to the teachings and traditions of one man to the teachings and traditions of another man – not me, not anyone. *Even if that change happens to bring you closer to truth!* When you blindly follow a man or a church – *even a righteous man or the true church* – you're not following God! And eventually that man or the man who succeeds him will lead you away from truth **and you will follow him!**

God has repeatedly raised up men who taught the truth, brought together groups of men and women who loved the truth, developed followings of millions of true Christians... only to have the whole group led off into heresy by the same man later in life, or another man as soon as he died.

God's purpose in calling you is to teach you to love TRUTH, and worship HIM. If you give your loyalty to any man or group of men, even if it's called "the church of God", *they WILL eventually betray you*. They, or the man who takes power after they die, will eventually turn their backs on God. And if you need them too much – if you're still dependent on that church – **they will drag you into false Christianity with them.**

The purpose of the church is dual; first, it is a light of the world and spreads the truth. It brings people together to share and learn from one another and gives a great many people an opportunity to learn truth. Something one man working alone can hardly do.

But later, after a few years or decades, that same church gets filled with corruption. Ideally, it would be rooted out by the membership as soon as it rears its ugly head, but in reality it winds up taking over the church sooner or later.

And this corruption, while unavoidable, serves a great purpose in providing a source of deception to see who was following the ministry and who was following God. You will always be shocked when you learn the true percentages.

Some few, even in the OC church, with the help of the holy spirit, recognized and overcame their carnality. An even greater number in the NC church will have, with the help of the holy spirit, recognized and overcome their carnality. But even in the NC church it will still be the few, a tiny number among the many who were called. Why does God do it this way? **Hebrews 12:26-27.**

God wants His Kingdom to be full of those things that CANNOT BE SHAKEN FROM TRUTH. So He will shake the church, the earth, even the heavens – the angels – to see who is in the church for the wrong reasons... and who will cling to truth against man, devil, and church.

## BUT... YOU'VE GOT TO GO TO CHURCH SOMEWHERE!

Going to church is something ingrained in everyone on Earth, whether Buddhist, Methodist, or Catholic – Muslim, Pentecostal, or Seventh-Day Adventist. The day varies, but the necessity of going to some church – ANY church – once a week is absolutely fundamental to all.

Yet the Bible – the NT in particular – is almost completely silent on the subject. The word "church" is used 79 times in the NT, but in most of them it is used merely as a label for a certain group of people such as "the church at Corinth".

I'm not saying we shouldn't go to church – you'll see below, the Bible teaches that we should. I'm saying considering how important church attendance is to the entire world's false religions, *it's strange that the Bible is almost completely silent on the subject*. Don't you think? I mean, this is a FUNDAMENTAL requirement of all churches. It is VERY important to them. Why isn't it important enough to God to put a single clear commandment in the Bible like "thou shalt go to church"?

**When things are important to God, He makes them obvious. He talks about them again and again. And while we strive to live by EVERY word of God, the relative importance of God's commands can be inferred by how often, and how clearly, God talks about them.**

You've been taught all your life you MUST go to church. You've also been taught that ANY church is better than no church. That even if you don't completely agree with their teachings, you MUST go to church. You've been told you must have fellowship weekly with other Christians *no matter what those Christians believe or how they act*.

You've never heard a scripture quoted to prove any of those points. You've probably never stopped to examine the idea at all. Of COURSE you should go to church! Everyone knows that! But is that really true? IS any church better than no church?

Is it necessary to go to church SOMEWHERE, regardless of what day they keep, regardless of whether they are a part of a false Christianity and whether or not they teach the doctrines of antichrist? *Is that really what the Bible says?*

## ELIMINATION

Let's start by seeing if a church can be so corrupt you are commanded not to attend it: **Revelation 18:4**. If you attend a church that worships the image of the beast (the Catholic Church), is that better than no church at all? **Revelation 14:9-11**. Obviously, you are better off attending NO church than going to the Catholic Church for "fellowship". Thus, it is clearly possible for a church to be so bad that it is far worse to worship with them than not to worship with anyone at all.

But how bad does that church have to be, before it is in that category? Well, those same verses you just read said anyone who has his MARK will be treated with the rest of the false Christians. The mark is Sunday worship, so any church that worships on Sunday is a church you are commanded not to attend! Yes, not attending ANY church is better for you than attending a Sunday church!

This is very important to most people, so I'm going to belabor the point. If your church worships on Sunday, *they have the mark of the beast*. This was conclusively proven in Lesson 9 and the booklet "Who Commanded You To Keep Sunday?"

And if you worship on Sunday with them, *you are voluntarily accepting that mark and accepting the authority of the Catholic Church, and indeed the devil himself*. Did the saints of God ever have this mark? **Revelation 20:4**. (Note: Worshipping on Sunday in the past, before you were baptized, doesn't matter; your life as a saint begins at baptism).

So you are better off *not going to church at all* than to worship with ANY SUNDAY CHURCH. How is it possible to "remember the Sabbath" and "keep it holy", while assembling on Sunday with false Christians? I know I may be beating a dead horse, *but you can't serve the true God by assembling with false Christians as they worship their false god!*

## FELLOWSHIPING WITH UNBELIEVERS

Those are some bold statements. And they are VITAL to your understanding of how God feels about the churches of a false Christianity, so we are going to beat that dead horse a little more. In **Revelation 17:5**, God calls Catholicism the great whore, "mother of harlots". In earlier lessons, you learned these "harlots" are the daughter-churches of Catholicism, which we call Protestant Christianity.

These churches “protest” against the whore’s authority, but like her they commit fornication with the doctrines of the devil and they carry the mark of the beast. You, if you are a true Christian, are a member of the body of Christ – the church of God. Should you fellowship with any of these harlots (God’s words, not mine)? **1 Corinthians 6:15-16.**

Joining yourself to them – fellowshipping with them – makes you one of them in God’s eyes (**Revelation 18:4**). They do not believe God when He said, “*if you love me, keep my commandments*”. They do not believe God when He said, “*no man has ascended up to heaven*”. They don’t believe Him when He said Jesus was “*in all points tempted like as we are*”. In fact, if you look at it honestly **the average Protestant church does not believe a single thing about God that is right.**

**What doctrine do they understand the way the Bible plainly teaches it?** Law, faith, grace, heaven, hell, immortality of the soul, the plan of God, unclean meats, baptism, the purpose and nature of the devil; they worship on the wrong day of the week, believe God is a trinity not a family, believe in joining the military...

They remember His birth (which He never commanded, and which they do in the wrong season anyway), yet they ignore His death which He did command them to remember yearly (not daily or weekly). They celebrate His resurrection, which He did not command, but they don’t keep any of the holy days which He did command...

Do you begin to see? **There is not a single thing they have right. Not one!** I said all this to make my case that they are UNBELIEVERS, by definition. With all that in mind, should you assemble with them just for the sake of “fellowship”? **2 Corinthians 6:14-18.** Is it better to go to their table and eat their wafer on Sunday morning, than to do nothing at all? **1 Corinthians 10:20-21.**

And finally, a verse that should settle the question. These works – law-breaking, teaching the immortality of the soul, the trinity, and so on – are unfruitful works of darkness. The textbook definition, actually. So should you have fellowship with them? **Ephesians 5:11.**

The context of that verse is also relevant because those aren’t the only works of darkness that take place in churches. So go ahead and read all of **Ephesians 5:3-15.** So you see, “fellowshipping” with unbelievers, idolaters, liars – in short, commandment-breakers – is forbidden.

This doesn’t necessarily mean you can’t have business relationships, worldly interactions and even shallow friendships with such people (**1 Corinthians 5:9-11**). But if someone is called a BROTHER – if they think of themselves as your brother in Christ, and you would be FELLOWSHIPPING with them in a religious sense, as equals who share a common Father – you can’t do that. Because you don’t have a common Father, and pretending you do is like joining the body of Christ to the body of a harlot – and brings us full circle to **James 4:4.**

## WHAT ABOUT SABBATH-KEEPERS?

Is any Sabbath-keeping church better than no church at all? There are many out there – Seventh-day Adventists are the largest group, but there are many others. Should you find your nearest Sabbath church and attend with them?

Sabbath-keeping is the mark of God, and it is certainly a step in the right direction. **But the Sabbath is only one commandment.** In the context of church attendance, **3 John 1:11** tells us “*follow not that which is evil*”. Evil is breaking of the commandments, and how many must you break to be considered guilty? **James 2:10-11.**

If you are attending with brethren who break the commandments and don’t follow the examples of the first century church, what should you do? **2 Thessalonians 3:6.** And if you find them disagreeing with the Bible and unwilling to change, what should you do? **2 Thessalonians 3:14.** How many times should you argue with them before you give up? **Titus 3:10.**

If someone comes to you and doesn’t teach the doctrine of the Bible, what should you do? **2 John 1:10-11.** If you shouldn’t even invite him into your *house*, or tell him “goodbye”, because you might be a partaker of his evil deeds... **can you imagine what would happen if you go to a church filled with such people?**

Is it possible to appear to be a true church of God in doctrine, but in works deny God? In other words, to have the doctrines right, but have the ministry and membership be a false church in practice? **Titus 1:16**. If their focus isn't on truth, *then no matter what their appearance, what should you do?* **1 Timothy 6:5**. Can people seem to love God and love truth – and yet not be true Christians? **Ezekiel 33:31-32**.

What should you do if people SEEM to be a Godly church, but deny the power of God? **2 Timothy 3:5**. What is the power of God? **1 Peter 1:5, 1 Corinthians 2:5**. FAITH is your access to the power of God! If your church SEEMS like a church of God but their WORKS deny God, and they don't have FAITH in God, *YOU ARE COMMANDED "FROM SUCH TURN AWAY"!*

## ANTICHRIST – THE TEST OF TRUTH

And finally, the surest test of all. John wrote his books about thirty years later in the first century than any other writer, and he saw the church he and the other apostles had built in tatters, overcome by deception and “the mystery of iniquity” on every side. It was very important in that time, as it is in ours, to have a CLEAR way to tell whether God is in a church or not. That way was given to us in **1 John 4:1-3**.

People can be deceived. They may know considerably less than you do about God. **Most of what they know may be wrong. That doesn't mean they aren't sincere and God isn't working with them.** The way you can tell is the doctrine of Antichrist. Talk to them about the nature of God and Jesus; the carnal nature Jesus had, His temptation in all points that we are tempted in, His humanity. Talk to them about the pagan origin of the trinity, the family of God, and our incredible destiny.

**If they go insane, begin frothing at the mouth and biting you on the leg... then that probably isn't a church of God.** At best, you will usually be asked to leave the church as fast as they can shove you out the door. But if they hear you, then there is hope for them. For now. That doesn't mean they won't reject the truth as soon as they hear more of it. It doesn't make them a true church of God, but it does mean God may be calling them and you have an opportunity to share the truths with them that I have committed to you, which were committed to me by others.

## SO WHERE SHOULD YOU ATTEND?

We eliminated pretty much all churches with the last few pages. Simply because “*the devil deceives the whole world*” (**Revelation 12:9**), and “*the whole world lies in wickedness*” (**1 John 5:19**). We've also established you are better off going to NO church, than to go to one that has the doctrines of antichrist, the mark of the beast, or has a form of Godliness but denies the power of God.

Now we'll ask where you SHOULD attend. To start with, we have to ask **who is your brother in Christ?** You've been trained from your earliest Christian memories that all of these other Christian churches are your brothers in Christ. You were told “sure, those other denominations are not as enlightened as mine”, but “we're all spokes of a giant wheel heading towards Jesus in the center”. Does Jesus agree? WHO is His brother? **Matthew 12:47-50**.

There is your answer! A faithful Catholic is NOT my brother – Christ just said so – because he is NOT doing my Father's will. Neither is my Baptist neighbor my brother. He may be a wonderful person on a physical, sort-of-Old-Covenant level *but unless he keeps my Father's commandments (all of them), he isn't my brother in Christ* – he is a false Christian! (**1 John 2:3-4**).

Your brother obeys the will of your Father. It's that simple. Most people object right here and say “well, nobody's perfect! You can't expect someone to be PERFECT before you go to church with them” – and I didn't say you should. If someone is ignorant of the law – even of the Sabbath – that sin doesn't count against them (**Romans 5:13**).

**But when someone tells them Sunday is the mark of the beast and they keep it anyway, they are no longer ignorant.** They are now WILFULLY breaking the command of God, and no brother of Jesus would do that!

**(Hebrews 10:26)**. So no, you don't have to find a PERFECT church to attend with. But you must find one that is sincerely SEEKING TRUTH.

They all say they are – but remember what you've read! All churches PROFESS they know God! They all CLAIM to love God more than life! **But most deny him in their works!** And it is by their WORKS that you shall know them! How can you tell if a church is sincerely seeking truth or not? **Matthew 7:16-20**.

Easy! If they don't know that, for example, heaven and hell are unbiblical doctrines *tell them!* Prove it to them, using your Bible! If they accept it, *they love truth!* If they hate you and shun you and push you out of their church, *their works have proved they do NOT love God – they love their church!*

Did you think the way into the kingdom/family of God would be an easy one? Paved with potlucks and church picnics and dances, filled with dear friends walking arm in arm into the sunset to meet Christ? That is what it's like on the WIDE, easy way which leads to destruction (**Matthew 7:13**). Not the narrow, perilous journey along cliff's edge towards righteousness! (**Verse 14**).

If someone objects and says “but you can't know their heart!” (and someone will), tell them *you don't have to know their heart!* **Show them Luke 6:45**. Their works and their words COME FROM THEIR HEART! If their heart loves God **their words and their works will show it!** If their heart hates the true God, their words and their works will show that too – by their FRUITS! After all, where do their words and their works come from? **Matthew 15:18-20**.

The whole question of whether any church is better than no church is solved so easily in **Exodus 23:2**. **What else is a false church doing, if not following a multitude to do evil? Isaiah 59:3-4** describes so many modern churches today! *But they continue to attend church and seem to be a Christian church!* **Isaiah 58:2**.

All churches LOVE to pray, they LOVE to sing praises to God, and they LOVE to worship Him daily! But are those things what make a person a brother of Christ? **Matthew 7:21-23, Matthew 15:8-9**. And who is Jesus' brother? **Luke 8:21**.

## COMMANDED ASSEMBLY

The only scripture that really commands assembling with brethren in the NT is **Hebrews 10:25**. **But as always: read the context, and ask yourself; WHAT EXACTLY DOES THIS SAY?** Does it say “do not forsake the assembling of yourselves with antichrists”? Does it say “do not forsake the assembling of yourselves with the beast-worshippers”? Does it say “do not forsake the assembling of yourselves with those who have a form of Godliness but who deny the power thereof”? – most importantly, does it even *IMPLY* that “ANY CHURCH IS BETTER THAN NO CHURCH”??

Or does it say you should not forsake the assembling of OURSELVES together! OURSELVES – those who believe like US, those who are our true BROTHERS in Christ, fellow true Christians who obey the commands of our Father!

And back up to **verse 24**, where it says we should provoke those brethren to love and good works, as “*iron sharpens iron*” (**Proverbs 27:17**). And we should continue to assemble with these brethren at every opportunity. **But keep reading in Hebrews 10:26!** There it tells you what happens when you have PROVOKED these people, if they reject the truth you gave them!

If they are true brethren, when you provoke them to good works they will love you (**Proverbs 9:8**). If they don't, and if they “stop their ears”, or if the truth you said offended them, what does Jesus say about them? **Matthew 15:12-14**. Can you offend people with the truth? **Psalms 119:165**.

You can't hurt people with the truth. It is not possible! If you provoke the brethren to love and good works and they reject you, **then they weren't true brethren. A church doesn't have to be perfect for you to attend with them.**

**But they do have to be willing to learn, and have a sincere heart and a genuine wish for growth and more understanding of God. Otherwise, they are a church of the false Jesus, serving a false god.**

## SO WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?

I don't know of a church I can tell you to attend. If I did, I'd never have written this course – I'd simply have sent you there. But I've been to most of the Sabbath-keeping churches, and I have satisfied myself there is nothing for me in them. I don't want you to take my word for that however. Not only did I learn a great deal during my journey through the modern-day apostate churches of God, but I did some good things for them as well, even if it was nothing more than giving them another opportunity to hear the truth and reject it.

I encourage you to go, attend with whomever you like. But take your Bible with you, and keep it open. When you hear a ridiculous, unbiblical doctrine spouted from the pulpit, you are armed with the tools you need to discredit it. Don't be afraid to stand up for the truth and tell people when they teach a doctrine directly contradicted in your Bible.

But as you enter these churches, remember the words in **Luke 9:26**, **2 Timothy 2:12**, and **Matthew 10:34**. If you aren't prepared to stand your ground against unbelievers, you don't love truth enough. On the other hand, you won't be doing it alone; **Jeremiah 1:17-19**, **Ezekiel 3:4-11**. That's not just for old prophets – that's for you and me. See **Matthew 10:14-33**. If this doesn't describe you, if you don't have enemies who hate you for the truth's sake, you aren't doing something right – more on that in the next lessons.

Eventually, when you've gone through enough churches to learn what I have learned, what should you do then? I still haven't given you a good answer for the question "where do you go to church, if there is no true church to attend? If there are no true brethren that live nearby, *what should you do every Sabbath?*"

## BACK TO THE COMMANDMENT

Strip away the ideas you inherited about church attendance. Go back to the basics. WHAT DID God command you to do on the Sabbath? **Exodus 20:7-11**. So the command is two parts:

1. Do no work.
2. Remember the Sabbath day (what it represents), *so that* you can keep it holy.

No mention is made of congregating with other believers; *much less* "any church is better than no church". Here, there is no explicit command that you HAVE to assemble with other people in order to keep the Sabbath.

The Sabbath is mentioned many times throughout the Bible, and most of them have to do with not working on the Sabbath. Very, very few have any context of assembling. There is one command however, in **Leviticus 23:3**, where it commands "a holy convocation". Convocation simply means "a calling together, an assembly".

It makes sense that the meaning of the Sabbath is best "remembered", when you assemble with other true Christians. So we can safely say assembling on the Sabbath with brethren is commanded. However, *what if there are no brethren?* Or what if they live so far away it would be impractical to visit every week?

Remember what I said earlier – in speaking of the Sabbath, God said "do no work" *hundreds* of times. But I can count on one hand the times He mentioned gathering together with other believers on the Sabbath. From that we can infer *it is far more important not to work on the Sabbath than to gather with brethren. Both should be done, if possible, but only one is an absolute requirement.*

But that's not proof – so we need examples of people who have done this, and fortunately there are many. Let's start with the story of Elijah. In **1 Kings 19:14**, Elijah said he was the only prophet of God left in Israel. Now, there were churches all over Israel. They kept the Sabbath, holy days, and looked like the people of God. *But in reality, they served Baal!* Those churches had forsaken God's covenant and killed all the true prophets of God. **So where did Elijah go to church?**



After the events of **1 Kings 17** and **18**, Elijah – greatly disheartened and alone – fled to Mt. Sinai and hid in a cave for 40 days – read **1 Kings 19:1-14**. Where did he go to church during that time? After this, God told him in **verse 18** that he was not alone, there were in fact 7,000 left in Israel. But notice the qualifications on these 7,000!

First, they had not bowed their knees to Baal; and second, they had not kissed him – both were a part of their regular church services. **Had they been assembling with Jezebel and Ahab at church, they would not have been God’s people! So these 7,000 were not going to church with Jezebel and Ahab!**

An even more important fact was that *Elijah didn’t know any of these people or he wouldn’t have thought he was alone!* There may have been 7,000 people out there, but Elijah wasn’t going to church with them **because he didn’t know who they were!**

I don’t doubt there are many true Christians out there today – but I don’t know where they are. I know I didn’t find them in the churches I’ve been to – or at least, they weren’t there on the days I was. I did find sins that would have made Jezebel blush tolerated by the people and the ministry in the name of “love” – and that was in the churches that actually had the doctrines mostly right.

Another case history of a churchless prophet is Jeremiah. His people “worshipped God” in His temple (**Jeremiah 7:2-11**), but they had idols and incense and baked cakes to the Queen of Heaven too. In other words, **they had false doctrines mixed in with true doctrines! Just like modern Christianity!** So did Jeremiah go to church with them? Read **Jeremiah 15:16-17**.

Notice! Jeremiah was a true Christian – he was called by God’s name! And he says he did NOT sit in the “assembly of the mockers, nor rejoiced” with them! Where would you assemble with people who were mocking God’s ways, and rejoice with them? Church!

And Jeremiah said rather than sit with those people, “I sat alone because of your hand”! **He chose to sit alone rather than go to church with false Christians!** He didn’t “rejoice before God” with them! He wasn’t saying “amen” to their prayers or singing “onward Christian soldiers” with false brethren who had rejected the will of his Father!

What did God say to him? That he shouldn’t “lean to his own understanding”? That he should “not forsake the assembling of the brethren”? That he “shouldn’t be so self-righteous”, and should “pick the best church”, the “lesser of the evils”? **Jeremiah 15:19**.

Jeremiah was PRAISED for keeping himself apart from the apostate Christians! God said his job was to “*be as God’s mouth*” – that is, to tell them what God said and “*provoke them to love and good works*” – and these people he’d left in these churches might return to him, but he was NOT to return to them! And to help him do that, God made him a promise in **verse 20**.

And if you do as God commands and provoke them to good works, and if you are “as God’s mouth” to them, telling them the commands of God and insisting on righteousness from your members and your ministry, I promise you they will indeed fight against you and put you out of their church – but God says they will not prevail against you!

David said a nearly identical thing regarding false churches in **Psalms 26:4-5**. Can you say that? Can you say that “*you will not go in with dissemblers*” (dissemblers is better translated as “concealers of truth”, i.e., those who reject true doctrines). Can you say that you have hated the congregation (congregation! As in a CHURCH congregation!) of evil-doers? Can you say, as David did, that you will NOT sit with the wicked?

True Christians can.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Contrary to what it may seem, I do encourage you to go to church. If you’ve been going to church with a group that has the flaws I’ve shown today, or similar ones, *go back!* Don’t just disappear, go and TELL THEM their

faults. Provoke them to love and good works! And when they kick you out, as they certainly will, go somewhere else!

Provoke them to love and good works as well! Eventually you'll either find a church that loves truth, or far more likely, you'll wind up alone as Elijah, Jeremiah, and David did. Or, you may be overcome by their deception – if so, God's church will be better off without you. I know that sounds calloused, but it's a simple fact.

We are put here to learn the truth, and then we must spend our entire lives defending that truth from every onslaught of man, lust and devil to prove we love that truth more than anyone, anything, even our own lives (**Luke 14:26**). Sometimes we are blessed with others to walk that road with us and share some of the burden – but we dare not let them share too much of the burden, or we'll soon find ourselves worshipping the church instead of God.

The church of the next few decades may continue to be scattered and few, or it may become relatively mighty again, as God wills it. It tends to come in cycles, so that a generation can have a chance to learn, then later be tempted and have a chance to reject God. I think (guess alert!) it's about time for an upswing... but what do I know.

Regardless of what happens to the rest of the church, you can keep the Sabbath on your own, alone in your bedroom if necessary. It isn't the ideal, but if you have no true brethren to associate with, it may be the best way you can observe the Sabbath.

Modern technology provides us with many resources which make remembering the Sabbath and keeping it holy quite easy compared to our ancestors. For one thing, this correspondence course is an excellent way to pass many hours on the Sabbath. Read your Bible all the way through – then do it again. Think about it, ask questions, *“prove all things; hold fast that which is good”* (**1 Thessalonians 5:21**).

Churches will be afraid of your questions; false ministers will always fear questions, and usually respond with anger to them. But God isn't afraid of them. It is impossible to anger God with a sincere question, however odd or irreverent it may sound. Question what God says; prove to yourself that He does not lie, and when you have proven it, remember it; write it down somewhere and tell others about it.

For variety, learn more about the places and events mentioned in the Bible from history books – learn about Babylon, Egypt, Rome, Pilate, Herod, Nebuchadnezzar, and the others. Eat, rest, enjoy the reprieve from the rest of your life in Satan's busy world. You're a thousand times better off keeping the Sabbath that way, than attending a lukewarm deceived church “just because you have to go to church somewhere”. This, as you now know, is simply not what the Bible teaches.

As a final comment, a personal one, I do not presently have a church, nor do I particularly want one. I can't send you somewhere and say “go here, assemble with these brethren, they will help you learn the truth”. Perhaps as enough people learn the truth through this correspondence course over the next few years that will change.

But for now, we're on our own. And though groups and churches we may choose to assemble with may come and go, we always will be on our own. **God saves people, not churches.** And if you ever lose your identity, your “self” to a church, you will cease at that moment to be a Christian. At that point, you become a “Churchian”. And your church can't save you – but it desperately wants you to let it try.

Meanwhile, I'm available to help you in any way I can, and if you've come this far and understood and obeyed what you've read in your Bible, odds are we obey the same Father. So if you and I and a Bible were to gather together, we would be a church. Never forget that. If you take away nothing else from this lesson, remember this: *“...where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them”* (**Matthew 18:20**).

*NOTES*

This work is completely non-denominational and is meant to fulfill Christ's great commission to "*preach the gospel to every creature*" (**Mark 16:15**). **This publication is not to be sold**; "*freely ye have received, freely give*" (**Matthew 10:8**).

The Bible tells us to PROVE ALL THINGS, and The Simple Answers encourages people to do just that. If you cannot PROVE what you believe, you have no right to believe it! Many of the things we print are shocking because they are different from what you've heard, but if something we say offends or upsets you, we hope you will take the time to set aside your preconceived ideas and PROVE your point from the Bible to see if you truly have been right all these years.

We are dedicated to providing the SIMPLE answers to difficult questions. Please submit questions and/or comments to us using the contact information below.

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