

The Church

There are a couple of shows on TV that we watch on occasion, House Hunters and House Hunters International. The premise of the shows is that people are looking for a house to either buy or rent and the location could be just about anywhere. It's kind of interesting to see the foreign locations and the style of houses, how they are built and the difference in the amenities that are included, bathrooms, kitchens, storage, things that are part of the cultural expectation and things that are not. Almost without exception, the agents that are helping the house hunters, sit down with them at the beginning of the show, and ask them for their list of must haves and things that they might be willing to compromise on. The agent's job is to find houses that most closely fit the must haves of the clients with the fewest compromises.

We use this same procedure when making the decision on which car to buy, what TV we want, or which clothes to wear. We may not sit down and write out our expectations as such, but we know what we want and we try to fill those desires.

If you have ever participated in something like a fantasy football or basketball league you probably did your due diligence in your research to be able to draft the best team you could. Now, this isn't to be a discussion of picking houses or fantasy football teams. Those things just illustrate the lengths that people go to, to make sure they are making the right decision on what to buy or whatever.

1 The question is, why don't people go to the same lengths when picking a church to attend or become a part of? What is the criteria that people use to choose a church?

I have talked with many people over the years who stated they were looking for a church to attend. Their list of "*must haves*" are as different as their opinions are. Some base their choice on the entertainment value of the services, some on whether they think the other members are friendly, some on friendships or acquaintances with other members, some on the preacher or some on the Elders or leadership. I have had people come to me and want to know what was the stand of my church on certain issues? I find that disturbing at the least, because, quite frankly...

- 2**
- 1) I don't have a church, I never will
 - 2) The whole concept of your church, my church is unscriptural and can lead men to fall away from doing God's will, it is in fact adding to or taking away from that truth

Rev 22:18-19

3

18 I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book; **19** and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.

Why will we go to such great lengths to scour the internet for information about, you name it, but when it comes to the single most important decision that we will ever make, one that determines life now and in eternity, do we take such a haphazard, uninformed approach to how we worship God, and where we worship God? What is it about eternal life that most people think so little of it?

This is a series we looked at about 5 or 6 years ago that, given the events of the times, I thought would be prudent to look at again. Over the next couple of lessons or so, what we want to do is take a look at...

4

What is the Church?

Not just any church, but...

5

Thee Church

What elements make a church, Thee Church? Where do we go to find the standard that defines God's Church?

The importance of being able to know what God wants is vital to our eternity...

John 4:23-24

6

23 "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. **24** "God is spirit, and make, those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

Christ is saying here that the one who would *truly* worship God must come to Him on God's terms, in...

7

spirit and Truth

What does that mean, Spirit and Truth? I didn't capitalize the s in spirit here so that I didn't send the wrong message. In this context the spirit under discussion is not the Spirit of God or the Holy Spirit, rather, it is speaking of our spirit, our emotional acceptance of faith that we bring to our creator. What Christ is saying here is that our attitude in our worship is just as important as is the manner in which we do what God wants, the Truth. The implication is obvious, if man does not come to God as prescribed in His Truth, and does so with an attitude of humility, love, faith, hope, and obedience, then he is not truly worshipping in either spirit or truth. The scriptures are absolutely clear as to what will happen to that man...

Matt 15:13

8

13 But He answered and said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be rooted up."

There are so many people out there who, from every indication, are sincerely trying to worship God, but because of ignorance, lack of knowledge or understanding, or being misled by people in whom they put too much trust, are in a position where they are in danger of being that plant that neither God nor his truth has planted and being rooted up. Note what Christ says in...

Mark 7:6-7

9

6 And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far away from Me.
7 'But in vain do they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.'

Sincerity is not the issue nor is it the core of truthful worship, as so many people think. How many times have you heard someone say, "I know in my heart that I am right with God?" Paul addresses that very attitude in...

Acts 23:1

10

1 And Paul, looking intently at the Council, said, "Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day."

Paul had lived his life in all sincerity and faith in accordance with what he understood the Will of God to be. If sincerity were the determining factor then Paul would have been found righteous in his sincerity, yet he was not, which is why Ananias told him in...

Acts 22:16

11

16 'And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.'

Sincerity does not save. Neither does faithful obedience in a doctrine based on the precepts and teachings of man. That is the point Christ makes in Mark 7, and that is the point in...

1 John 4:1-6

12

1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. **2** By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; **3** and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; and this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. **4** You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. **5** They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them. **6** We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

The Spirit of God here is the Truth that the Spirit brought, **2 Tim 3:16**, conversely, the spirit not from God, by definition, are the precepts of men, the antichrist, all who neither teach nor practice the Truth of God. Paul addresses that in...

Gal 1:9

13

9 As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed.

The concept of accursed is more than just losing their eternal life, though that in and of itself is more than enough, but consider for a moment this thought. We often talk about what it would be like if watching someone we know as they stand before Christ and are judged, they turn to us and say, why didn't you ever tell me about this? Imagine, for a moment, someone who is sincere in his faith in the precepts of men, and has been diligent in their teaching of those precepts to so many others, only to hear those many others and themselves condemned for the hypocrisy and vanity of their teaching of those precepts of men. How sad to know you had a part in their condemnation. How cursed that would make one feel.

We must understand that there is no wiggle room, no loopholes, no alternative realities, to truly worship God we must worship Him in spirit and Truth, there is only one way to worship God and that is His way, that is what Paul says in...

Eph 4:1-6

14

1 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, **2** with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, **3** being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. **4** There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; **5** one Lord, one faith, one baptism, **6** one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

15

One body - The Church

One Spirit - Both the Holy Spirit and the truth that He brought;

One Hope - The promise of eternal life and salvation through that truth;

One Lord - Christ our Savior;

One faith - One response to the truth, not multiple variations of it;

One baptism - That response which defines our salvation;

And ultimately...

16 One God and Father

Which is why there is only one, faith, baptism, calling, church, etc..

Brethren we need to understand, it is vital that we understand, **Eph. 4**, and what it is saying. There is no room in God's word for variations in doctrine. Opinions, yes, as long as they are not bound as doctrine or arrived at on the basis of the precepts of men. There is only one Doctrine and one interpretation of Scripture...

2 Peter 1:20-21 **17**

20 But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, **21** for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

That is the point of **2 Tim**, to rightly divide the Word of Truth is to seek after and allow God to show His interpretation of His truth and then to faithfully follow it. You have heard it said...

18 ***God's Word is its own best commentary***

Anything other and...

Eph 4:17-24 **19**

17 This I say therefore, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, **18** being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart;

This point needs to be emphasized. God defines ignorance, futility of mind, as walking in darkness motivated by the hardness of heart. Ignorance of God's Word is a choice that people make. They can choose otherwise, but don't. Paul goes on...

20 **19** and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. **20** But you did not learn Christ in this way, **21** if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus,

There is another point to remember here. Note how Paul talks about hearing Christ. This is talking about hearing the truth that Christ taught. Paul says...

21 ***If indeed you have heard Him***

Obviously the implication is that Christ can be heard but not INDEED be heard. That is talking about not just hearing the words but letting them sink in and transform us. That is the scriptural concept of HEAR.

22 **22** that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, **23** and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, **24** and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

The futility of mind, allowing ourselves to dwell in the darkness of our ignorance, understanding, and hardness of heart leads to being excluded from the life of God, in God, which is from God, eternal Life. Brethren it is only ourselves that can deny us a right relationship with God through Christ and His word. It is only our own hardness of heart and ignorance, because we have chosen to not seek after God in His word that will cause to us to be lost.

Regardless of sincerity, faithful obedience to, or even the goodness of it, through dedication to anything other than God's truth, man cannot be saved by that dedication. The precepts of men can nor ever will bring man into a right relationship with God. Man can find completeness only in the one Church, one faith, one baptism, one Lord, and one Spirit. It is solely man's own personal responsibility to search the scriptures, to rightly divide them so that he can know exactly what he must do and how God wants to be worshipped. There is only one way.

Now we have been talking about a rather large generality, but the scriptures are clear, there is only one way to worship at God's feet, His way, without the perverted influence of man and his teaching. We can see that in the passages that we have talked about. In the next few lessons we will look at specifics of what is entailed in our worship as a Church, the work of the Church, and the defining standards as given by God that set His Church apart from the world and the religions of man.

The Church is the kingdom of prophecy. It is what Christ rules and what He will come back for...

Eph 5:25-27

23

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, **26** so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, **27** that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.

The importance of the Church is clear. Christ will present it to His Father when He returns. So doesn't it make sense to be a part of that Church? Doesn't it make sense to figure out what I must do to align myself with it? Just as the Church is to be apart from this world as proscribed by God, so must the members of that Church be set apart from the world by the things that they practice and teach. In **Acts 2: 41, 47** we see that the Lord added to His Church those who were being saved. Those who had responded in faith to what they heard and believed, those who accepted the word into their hearts and repented of their past lives and were now ready to live the confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

The Church will be returned to God, in heaven, and only those that are faithful and obedient to the Word and come to God in that faith and obedience through Christ are added to the Church. So, what's the sensible thing to do?