

Thursday, May 5, 2011 – Does the church in the New Testament exist today?

“ATTEND THE CHURCH OF YOUR CHOICE THIS SUNDAY”

Often one driving will see a bumper sticker or sign of some kind which states the above thought; sincere as the person who created the sticker or the one who attaches it to their car may have been, they have missed what is most important!

“I BELIEVE IN ALL PATHS TO GOD”

The above phrase is uttered in a number of television ads by our supposed “enlightened” experts in Hollywood.

If I may, let me make the following observations:

- ❖ Man’s choice does not matter (**Jeremiah 10:23; Isaiah 55:8-9**); one must attend THE CHURCH OF JESUS’ CHOICE
  - The church of Jesus’ choice is THE ONE WHICH HE PURCHASED with His blood! (**Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23; Revelation 5:9; Colossians 1:13-14; Hebrews 9:12-14; 1 Peter 1:18-21; Ephesians 1:7; Revelation 1:5**)
  - The English word “CHURCH” comes from a compound Greek word which means “called out.” This is illustrated in **1 Peter 2:9** and **Galatians 1:6**
  - A church is not a literal building made of brick, wood, or any other such substance; it is a SPIRITUAL BUILDING—God’s building (**1 Corinthians 3:9-11**)—made of living stones (**1 Peter 2:5**) which are built upon a foundation with Christ being the cornerstone (**Acts 4:11; Matthew 21:42; Ephesians 2:20-22**)
  - Church buildings are not holy; Christians are (**1 Corinthians 6:11**)

I have been asked a number of times how many churches were established in the first century. That answer is very easy. Certainly there were numerous congregations (**Galatians 1:2; Revelation 1:11; et al**); however, there was but one church: That which was composed of all faithful Christians (**Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:47; Ephesians 1:22-23; 3:6, 10; 5:25-27; Colossians 1:18; 3:15; 1 Corinthians 10:17; 12:12; Romans 12:5; Galatians 3:26-28; 1 Timothy 3:5, 15**).

The next logical question then becomes how did we end up with so many denominations? The concept called “DENOMINATION” both implies and indeed requires division. The word means “to name”; something named is thereby differentiated from anything not so named. Consider the example of when people have children. The child is shown as distinct by having its own name—even if that name be

“Junior”. How about when a biologist discovers an organism never before observed, he will give it a two-word name to show its distinction. When it comes to the church our Lord made His thoughts very well known. Seventy four (74) times in the New Testament the word church is mentioned; not once is it referring to a divided body.

**Matthew 16:18 - And I also say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock (THE CONFESSION THAT JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD) I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.**

**Ephesians 5:23 - For the husband is the head of the wife, and Christ also is the head of the church, [being] himself the saviour of the body.**

Friends that is one church, one body of Christ.

Wayne Jackson made the following observations:

“Denomination” takes on a less-than-ideal sense when one considers its popular use in the lexicon of “Christendom.” “Christendom” is a term that embraces the entire religious terrain that professes any identification – however remote the connection may be – with Jesus Christ. This would include every kind of organism, from the Unitarian Universalist Church, to the various cults that allege an association with Christ (e.g., Christian Science, the Watchtower movement, etc.).”

- Denominationalism is the result of **division**.
- The ideology accommodates variant “ecclesiastical [church] *bodies*” with distinctive, doctrinal differences.
- Denominationalism tends to focus more upon **tradition** and preferential values than Scripture.
- The system engenders a spirit of adversarial rivalry rather than cooperation.
- The denominational concept encourages the idea that the **freedom to differ** on major points of doctrine is a healthy spiritual phenomenon.

Each of these propositions is antagonistic to biblical truth.

Denominationalism is wrong. There must be no compromise on this issue. Christians can and should oppose the system compassionately and courteously, but it must be resisted relentlessly. To neglect to do so is to fail in one’s responsibility.

Jesus prayed for the unity of His disciples, “**That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us**” (John 17:21). Paul asked

the Corinthians who were trying to denominate into groups following Paul, Apollos, Peter, or Christ, **“Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?”** (1 Corinthians 1:12-13). Paul also urged the Ephesians to **“... walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all”** (Ephesians 4:1-6).

The religious world COULD BE UNITED but like Jerusalem many do not desire to be (**Matthew 23:37; Proverbs 1:24-31**), for they could only be united with each other and God THROUGH HIS WORD! Those who are truly obedient to the Word of God are united with God and each other, for He is not the author of confusion (**1 Corinthians 14:33**) or division (**1 Corinthians 1:13**), but of unity (**Hebrews 13:20-21**)—any not obeying are neither united with God nor His church!

So we return to the question at the beginning of this article: DOES THE CHURCH OF THE BIBLE EXIST TODAY? Yes, it does!

1. If a religious body ...
  - 1.1.... is wholly submitting to the commands of God...
  - 1.2.... rejects every doctrine which originates with men...
    - 1.2.1. Did the first century church use anything other than God’s doctrine which we know today as the Bible?
      - 1.2.1.1. Religious groups have many CREEDS (e.g., Apostle’s Creed, Nicene Creed, Luther’s Catechism, Book of Discipline, Hiscox’ Standard Manual, The Book of Mormon, etc.)
    - 1.2.2. Their only creed was the INSPIRED WORD OF GOD (**Revelation 22:18-19; Deuteronomy 4:2**): the BIBLE, albeit in earthen vessels at that time (**2 Corinthians 4:7; 1 Corinthians 13:10**)—if that were all they had and it was sufficient (**2 Peter 1:3**), why would anyone want or need anything else?
      - 1.2.2.1. Simply, other creeds represent man’s desire to dictate for to God (**Matthew 15:9; Titus 1:14; Galatians 1:6-9**)
  - 1.3.... is the spiritual building of God, ...
  - 1.4.... is composed of those who are holy, ...
  - 1.5.... is called out from the world, ...
  - 1.6.... is distinct from all man-made institutions, ...
  - 1.7.... is not divided, but endeavors “to keep the unity of the spirit,” ...

- 1.8. ... is that one eternally purposed, ...
- 1.9. ... is the one of which the Old Testament prophesied, ...
- 1.10. ... is the one which John and Jesus promised, ...
- 1.11. ... is the one established on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem in the days of the Roman Empire, ...
- 1.12. ... uses no creed but God's inspired Word, ...
- 1.13. ... is the one to which God adds "such as should be saved," ...
- 1.14. ... is the one which recognizes God's role (grace) and man's roles (faith and works) as being equally necessary for salvation, ...
- 1.15. ... recognizes the authority of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, ...
- 1.16. ... worships in the right manner—in spirit and in truth, ...
- 1.17. ... is organized Scripturally with Christ as the Head, ...
- 1.18. ... wears a Scriptural name, ...
- 1.19. ... reaches out to the lost with the Gospel, ...
- 1.20. ... is concerned with meeting the physical needs of all men, ...
- 1.21. ... is concerned with spiritually strengthening her members, ...
- 1.22. ...and is the church of Jesus' choice which He purchased, ..... then IT IS  
THE CHURCH OF THE BIBLE!

How are we to be added to the church? People were not born into the church physically nor voted in, etc.; rather, "the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved (baptized)" (Acts 2:38, 41, and 47).

The design of water baptism in the New Testament is unquestionably to allow for the sinner's sins to be removed by the blood of Jesus. This purpose is variously described as "to be saved" (**Mark 16:16**), "for the remission of sins" (**Acts 2:38**), to "put on Christ" (**Galatians 3:27**), to "enter the kingdom of God" (**John 3:5**), to "wash away your sins" (**Acts 22:16**), to place one "into one body" (**1 Corinthians 12:13**) and "into Christ" (**Romans 6:3**). These are parallel expressions that identify the same design.

In an effort to avoid the clear introduction of such verses, some theologians have invented the concept that water baptism is a post-salvation action that follows the forgiveness of sins. Christendom, almost in its entirety, insists that remission of sin is imparted to the sinner at the very moment the sinner "believes" (i.e., accepts Jesus as personal Savior). This reception of Christ is an internal, mostly intellectual/mental decision in which the individual makes a genuine commitment to receive Jesus as Lord. This philosophy has no basis in scripture.

**Romans 6:3-7 - Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him**

**through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin.**

When the believing, penitent non-Christian allows him or herself to be lowered into the watery grave of baptism, a parallel to Christ's redemptive work is taking place. Baptism is into Christ's death because that is where He shed His blood on our behalf. The atoning activity of Christ was achieved in His death, burial, and resurrection. Consequently, the alien sinner taps into that redemptive power in the act of water immersion. Consider:

- The "newness of life" follows—not precedes—baptism (**vs. 6**).
- The "old man of sin," the "body of sin," is eliminated in the waters of baptism.
- Being immersed in water— "buried in baptism" (**vs. 4**)—is equivalent to "you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered" (**vs. 17**).
- Only then, i.e., in the act of emulating Jesus' atonement in the waters of baptism, is one "set free from sin" (**vs. 18**).

Notice that seven significant achievements occur at the point of water immersion: (1) baptized into Christ; (2) baptized into Christ's death; (3) newness of life; (4) united in His death; (5) old man/body of sin crucified/done away; (6) no longer slaves of sin; and (7) freed from sin.

My prayer is that you will carefully consider what the scriptures teach regarding the Lord's church. Jesus Christ is the head of the church. His legislation is found only within the sacred pages of the Holy Bible. The faith has been "once for all delivered" (**Jude 3**) and we will be judged based upon that inspired word. If all mankind would determine to go back to the Bible and the Bible alone for their rule of faith and practice, then apostasy (both in and out of the church) would end.