

# TRUTH

“ . . . Your word is truth ” (John 17:17)

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## MAN-MADE CHURCHES VERSUS JESUS' CHURCH

Depending on the criteria used in categorizing them, the number of denominational/man-made churches in existence today is at least several hundred. That is in stark contrast to the situation in the first century when there were *no* denominational bodies and Jesus' church was the *sole* church on the planet.

It may not make everyone happy to hear it, but in reality, the differences between the church Jesus built and all man-made churches are quite clear. Let us point out some of those fundamental differences.

Man-made churches were planned by humans. Jesus' church was planned by God Himself, and it is part of His eternal purpose. “. . . *now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church . . . according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus*” (Ephesians 3:10,11).

Jesus never promised to build any denominational bodies, but He *did* promise to build His church, saying, “. . . *I will build my church*” (Matthew 16:18).

Man-made churches were established by humans. The Bible says, “*Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it*” (Psalm 127:1). What about Jesus' church? He built it, just like He said He would, and we can read about it in the Scriptures (Matthew 16:18; Acts 8:1).

The church of the living God began in the first century just a few days after our Lord returned to heaven. It took place in about A.D. 30 in the city of Jerusalem (Acts 2:1-41). Man-made churches did not come into existence until hundreds of years later in various places throughout the world, not Jerusalem.

The Christ purchased the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28). Yes, He loved the church and gave Himself for it (Ephesians 5:25). Denominational groups have no connection with the blood of Calvary.

Many man-made churches select a human to serve as their head. The Lord's church has one Head, Jesus, and He has the preeminence in all matters (Colossians 1:18). He shares His headship with no one!

The Christ “*is the Savior of the body*” (Ephesians 5:23). In other words, He is the Savior of His church. Man-made churches are not a part of the saved body.

In denominational bodies, authority resides in individual men or human councils. In God's plan,

Jesus has all authority in the church (Matthew 28:18) and it must submit to Him (Ephesians 5:24).

There are scriptural descriptions/designations for the church Jesus bought, such as “*the church of God*” (1 Corinthians 1:2). Collectively, local churches are designated as “*the churches of God . . . in Christ Jesus*” (1 Thessalonians 2:14) and “*the churches of Christ*” (Romans 16:16). Many man-made churches use man-devised designations, naming themselves after a founder or a doctrine.

People can “join” man-made groups, but you cannot do that with Jesus' church. When one is born again/saved, God adds him/her to His church (Acts 2:47). In some denominations, the only way for a person to become a member is to be “voted in” by its members. That policy is *not* part of the biblical plan God has for His church. No one can be voted into it. One becomes a member of God's family by means of a spiritual birth (Galatians 3:26,27).

A number of man-made groups have written creeds or manuals to which they appeal as their standard of authority. Such creeds exist without divine authority and from time to time undergo changes. Remember this: God's word needs no revisions. His church is committed to following His gospel and nothing else! (Galatians 1:6-8).

Jesus' church exists in the world by the authority of Jesus (Matthew 21:25). Man-made churches exist by the authority of men. Activities and organizations which are based on human authority are not from heaven (Matthew 21:25).

Man-made religious organizations are facing a sad future. Why? The Master said, “*Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted*” (Matthew 15:13). Far different is the glorious future destiny of Jesus' kingdom/church: “*Then comes the end when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father . . .*” (1 Corinthians 15:24).

We all need to be ready to support and build up the Christ's church, at the same time opposing all man-made practices. Is that what *you* plan to do?

-- Roger D. Campbell

## LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF KING AMAZIAH

Though generally not as well-known as some others who ruled over God's peoples, the life and rule of Amaziah provide us with a number of valuable principles. We read of Amaziah's reign over Judah in two Bible chapters: 2 Kings 14 and 2 Chronicles 25.

In describing Amaziah, the Bible gives us this general statement: "*And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD, yet not like his father David; he did everything as this father Joash had done*" (2 Kings 14:3). At times, Amaziah's choices showed great wisdom; in other cases, his decisions were lousy. As a leader, Amaziah showed some skill, but being an *effective* leader and being a *God-pleasing* leader are not the same.

One of Amaziah's more memorable decisions took place after he and his troops achieved a military victory against the Edomites: ". . . *he brought the gods of the people of Seir, set them up to be his gods, and bowed down before them and burned incense to them*" (2 Chronicles 25:14). King Amaziah, who as king was responsible for guiding Judah to walk in the paths of righteousness, instead imported and worshipped false gods. How foolish can a person be?!

Let us identify some other lessons we can learn from Amaziah's life, which lasted fifty-four years.

- God's evaluation of Amaziah reveals that the man's heart was not right: "*And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD, but not with a loyal heart*" (2 Chronicles 25:2). Actions matter. So does the spirit with which one takes action. A heart that is loyal to Jehovah wants to please Him in every single matter.

- God's prophet told King Amaziah, ". . . *the LORD is not with Israel*" (2 Chronicles 25:7). When God tells His children that He is not with them, they need to ask, "Why is that the case? Why has He left us?" Look at yourself in the mirror in view of what the Scriptures say, my wayward brother. Now, are you ready to humble yourself and return to the Lord on His terms, or will you stubbornly refuse to repent?

- A great reminder: "*God has power to help and to overthrow*" (2 Chronicles 25:8). That is what a man of God told Ahaziah, and those truths never change. Continue reading below to see God in action.

- When Amaziah was concerned about retrieving money that he had dished out to soldiers from Israel, God's prophet reminded the king, "*The LORD is able to give you much more than this*" (2 Chronicles 25:9). God, the great Sovereign, has the entire universe and all spiritual blessings at His disposal. Never forget: He "*is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think*" (Ephesians 3:20). He is able to open the windows of heaven and pour out blessings as He

deems appropriate (Malachi 3:10).

- In one instance, Amaziah and Judah were defeated by the Northern Kingdom of Israel (2 Chronicles 25:21-24). That defeat was neither an accident nor a coincidence: God caused it to happen. Why? God said it was "*because they sought the gods of Edom*" (25:20). Choices have consequences, and the all-knowing, all-powerful God of heaven helps or opposes men and nations according to His wisdom.

- Jehovah is a jealous God. After Amaziah bowed before false gods, ". . . *the anger of the LORD was aroused against Amaziah . . .*" (2 Chronicles 25:15). Why? Because God is entitled to all of man's devotion and is not willing to share our affection with other "gods." That is what it means for our Creator, whose name is Jealous (Exodus 34:14), to be a jealous being.

- Idolatry is vanity. Following Amaziah's fall into idolatry, the Lord "*sent a prophet who said to him, 'Why have you sought the gods of the people, which could not rescue their own people from your hand?'*" (Chronicles 25:15). An idol is nothing (1 Corinthians 8:4), and it has no power to bless, protect, or punish. Regardless of the form of idolatry, God's appeal to His children is, "*And do not become idolaters as were some of them*" (1 Corinthians 10:7).

- Sadly, some people do not love the truth when they hear it. After the Lord's prophet rebuked Amaziah for his idolatry, the king's reaction was, "*Cease! Why should you be killed?*" (2 Chronicles 25:16). Getting mad at a messenger, even threatening to remove him from the land of the living, cannot change the truth that he proclaims. "*Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?*" (Galatians 4:16). Know this: those who do not love the truth cannot be saved (2 Thessalonians 2:10).

- A question worth pondering: ". . . *why should you meddle with trouble, that you should fall . . . ?*" (2 Chronicle 25:19). In this instance, those words referred to a carnal battle and were spoken to Amaziah by the king of Israel. In principle, though, that thought can have spiritual application to a child of God who is contemplating any activity. Why should a child of God meddle with spiritual disaster and take the risk of falling out of favor with God? Think about it.

- One statement about Amaziah is one of the most tragic thoughts in the entire Bible: ". . . *Amaziah turned away from following the LORD . . .*" (2 Chronicles 25:27). We can try to analyze why any person would make such a decision, but the spiritual consequence is the same in every case: one who leaves the Lord is without hope and God in the world (Ephesians 2:12).

-- Roger D. Campbell

## **Jesus — the Light of the World**

It is normal for young children, and even some adults, to suffer from nyctophobia. This common phobia is a fear of the dark. Also, it is highly possible that a person might not suffer from this phobia, yet be terrified to find themselves in a room or a house in total darkness. Movies often portray evil or immoral actions as being done in the dark. If a person wanted to commit a crime, they might wait for the cover of darkness. All of these things are true because darkness can help conceal.

In contrast, we read in the Scriptures that Jesus is the light of the world (John 8:12). Just a few verses later, He Himself said, *“As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world”* (John 9:5). In John’s account of the gospel, John spends these two verses and many more helping us understand that Jesus is the light that came into a world of darkness.

Darkness conceals, but Jesus came to this earth to reveal. He came not only to reveal sin, but to call His followers out of that sin and darkness into the light. In John 8:11, just before He says He is the light of the world, He tells a woman caught in adultery, *“. . . go and sin no more.”* In other words, yes, you have been living in darkness or sin, but do not stay there. Or, as Peter so beautifully describes how God, *“. . . called you out of darkness into His marvelous light”* (1 Peter 2:9).

The description of Jesus as the light of the world, is a wonderful one because it is one way that we can connect with Him and be like Him. You see, I cannot be sinless as He was. Also, I cannot fully understand His suffering on the cross. But I can be a light to the world. That was certainly His encouragement when He taught His disciples, *“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden”* (Matthew 5:14). And as Paul would write to the brethren in Philippi, they were to stand out as lights amongst the darkness of the world (Philippians 2:14-16).

At least three times in the book of Matthew, eternal punishment is described as outer darkness (Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30). That darkness is something we should avoid at all costs. Instead, we should be drawn to the One who is the light of the world, and we should reflect that light to the world.

God is light (1 John 1:5). Jesus is light (John 8:12). And, we are to be light (Matthew 5:14). What a wonderful connection and wonderful opportunity for us to share with the Father and the Son.

-- Joel Danley

## **Lessons from 1 John 3:4-9**

In the New King James Version, the heading over this passage is *“Sin and the Child of God.”* Let us take a thought or two from each verse in this section.

3:4 – Sin described – *“Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness (the transgression of the law, KJV).”* When a person disregards what God’s law says and does not obey it, that is a sin. It could be a wrong thought, word, or action, or it might be a failure to do what the Lord says, but any violation of His instructions is called sin.

3:5 – The sinless One – *“And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin.”* Who is the one who came to take away the sin of the world? The Son of God. He alone lived among humans without sin (Hebrews 4:14,15). Christians serve a sinless Savior, the perfect offering without spot or blemish (1 Peter 1:19).

3:6 – A saint who abides in the Christ – *“Whoever abides in Him does not sin.”* Jesus said His disciples are those who abide in His teaching (John 8:31). One whose pattern of life shows him complying with the Lord’s teaching, though he does make mistakes, is not a slave of sin. On the other hand, one who does not abide in the Lord is cast off (John 15:6).

3:7 – A righteous person in action – *“He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.”* No one is righteous by virtue of his own goodness (Romans 3:10). A righteous person does what is right in the sight of God. Since all of God’s commandments are righteousness (Psalm 119:172), one who practices them is righteous before Him, and His ears are open to their prayers (1 Peter 3:12).

3:8 – Why the Christ was manifested – *“For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.”* The devil continues to exist and sin still dominates the world. But, through the power of Jesus’ death and resurrection, we are made free from the bondage of sin, able to overcome the fear of death, and able to overcome death itself.

3:9 – God’s children who do not sin – *“Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.”* It is a fact that Christians sin, a truth we learned in 1 John 1:8. We must not allow sin to dominate our lives, causing us to be its slaves (Romans 6:12-16). What is a key element in us staying out of sin? Having God’s seed remain in us. Jesus said the seed is the word of God (Luke 8:11). If His word/teaching continues to abide in us, we will not be constant-practicers of sin.

-- Roger D. Campbell

## THE CHALLENGE TO PRACTICE SELF-CONTROL

*“And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown”* (1 Corinthians 9:25). Paul’s inspired words underscore the importance of temperance—or, self-control—for Christians. Though self-control is not always easy, Paul reminds Christians it is worth it, for the Christian is looking toward an **eternal** reward.

**What is self-control?** There are three closely-related words used for self-control in the New Testament; the New King James Version translates them as “*self-control*” (or “*self-controlled*,” Titus 1:8), except for 1 Corinthians 9:25 (“*temperate*”). The idea is actually just what the word says: control of self. Paraphrasing Joseph Thayer’s lexicon, the word indicates one who has control over his desires, passions, and appetites. Another way of saying self-control in a familiar, modern term is “self-discipline.”

In New Testament times, many were given over to fleshly gratification. Especially among the wealthy and powerful, the idea of refusing oneself something desired was often inconceivable. The concept of doing whatever felt good in the moment was common. Though some 2000 years removed from New Testament times, humanity has changed little in this regard: many still exercise little or no self-control.

Contrasted with the aforementioned “instant gratification” crowd of the first century were others who were pictures of self-control, such as elite athletes competing in the Greek games. Those athletes understood that there were some things that, though pleasurable for a moment, would potentially compromise their ability to compete at the highest level, so they abstained from such. This can still be observed in many elite athletes today who, though they may enjoy and desire cookies, potato chips, and such like, they practice self-control in either abstaining from them or else partaking of such in small and carefully-measured amounts.

**Why do I need self-control?** First and foremost, I need self-control because **God** says so. It is part of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), and it is also one of the “Christian graces” listed in 2 Peter 1:5-7. Through Peter, the Holy Spirit makes it clear that the “Christian graces” are not optional for God’s children (2 Peter 1:8-10). Christians also need self-control because, as Paul points out in 1 Corinthians 9:25, it is necessary to focus attention on our heavenly goal and to discern between temporary pleasures versus brief discomfort and/or abstinence resulting in eternal reward (compare to Moses, Hebrews 11:24-26).

### **In what areas of life do I need self-control?**

Regarding sinful things, self-control means abstaining totally (1 Peter 2:11). Even in acceptable/good areas, self-control is needed. Recreation is good, but without self-control leads to wasted time and neglected duties. Money is necessary in life, but one with no self-control in finances will be plagued with a multitude of problems. In matters like worship, self-control means getting sufficient rest beforehand, waking up on time, making sure needed study and preparation is done, and so on. Truthfully, all areas of life need some degree of self-control. Psalm 19:14 summarizes this concept well – “*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.*”

**How do I develop self-control?** This question is the essence of this study. Most Christians understand what self-control is, as well as the need for self-control in all areas of life and why it is important. But many struggle with self-control and want to know how to develop it. God’s word supplies some infallible guidelines for developing self-control:

- **Train the heart to be in sync with God.** Know, think on, and obey God’s word (Psalm 119:9,11).
- **Desire to please God above all others.** “*Do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ*” (Galatians 1:10).
- **Avoid places or situations of temptation.** “*Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of evil. Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn away from it and pass on*” (Proverbs 4:14,15). Choose to be around those who help, not hinder, self-control.
- **Remember the consequences of failing to exercise self-control.** “*For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness . . .*” (2 Peter 1:9; compare with Galatians 5:19-21).
- **Pray to God for help.** “*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God . . .*” (James 1:5,6).
- **Realize self-control is achievable** (Ephesians 4:17-24). Study Bible examples. Be encouraged by the good and warned by the bad. Self-control requires continuous effort, but we can do it.

*“Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble”* (2 Peter 1:10).

-- Chad Dollahite

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