

It has weighed on my mind for sometime to present a lesson on Biblical instruction for dealing with different individuals. The Bible is full of practical advice on how to handle scorners, brawlers, busybodies, fools—a panorama of human dispositions. Yet I have found in my personal dealings with other professing Christians, most want to handle every situation under the guidelines given for a “brother” in Christ (e.g., Matthew 18:15-17), or, otherwise, in a manner completely inconsistent with Scripture all together. It is the purpose of this article to identify the authentic Christian and better equip the reader to apply Biblical mandates.

#### WHO IS MY BROTHER?

There are several authenticating marks of God’s people given throughout the Scriptures, but the most striking and fundamental is love. “He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love,” (1 John 4:8). “Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails ...” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8a NASV).

Love believes all things, and those who present themselves to us as our brothers should be accepted as such, but not blindly. “For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 1:4). Some who profess Christianity are intentionally deceitful, turning the grace of God into a license to sin. Others believe they are doing the work of God and simply cannot tell the difference.

Christ said the words He spoke to us “are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63). In other words, the Bible describes essential values and spiritual forces that operate automatically in many cases. This can be confusing to the unconverted. As they apply various principles outlined in Scripture, they experience the power of these spiritual laws and misconstrue that power as justification of their beliefs. “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matthew 7:22). The distinguishing mark of both the deceived and the deceiver, is sin.

“Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. And you know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. Little children, let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning ...” (1 John 3:4-8a; NASV).

Sin is the transgression of the law. “[T]he wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23). Christ made it possible for us to be reconciled to God by

grace (Romans 3:24,25), but it is the *life of Christ* which saves us, not His death. “For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved *by his life*” (Romans 5:10, emphasis mine throughout).

True Christianity is *a way of life*, not a philosophy or an academic endeavor. It is based on the doctrine of Christ (1 John 1:9), who lived His life as a model for us to follow. “He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, *even as He walked*” (1 John 2:6). Paul wrote, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me,

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and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). That is true Christianity.

If you have the Son of God living in you, by the power of the Holy Spirit, then you are a child of God. “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Romans 8:14). But if this is true, you must be striving to do what Christ did, overcome the wickedness of this present evil world: “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne” (Revelation 3:21). “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21).

Our chapel is open to everyone, as it should be. And everyone has the opportunity to participate in any worship service held there. But we cannot, and should not expect everyone to be what they claim to be. Not even ministers, preachers or leaders in the congregation are above reproach, if their deeds betray them: “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). As in the examples above, these “transformed” ministers still show that identifying mark of sin: “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:15-16a).

Your brother is the one who walks in the truth, if, and only if, you walk in the truth. “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?” (Romans 6:16). Jesus answered our question this way, “For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother” (i.e., His family; Matthew 12:50).

#### WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

The Church of God is a spiritual organism, not a physical organization. The word

*church* is translated from the Greek word *ekklesia*, meaning *a calling out* (Strong’s #1577). “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath *called you out* of darkness into his marvelous light: (1 Peter 2:9). This calling out of God began on the Day of Pentecost following the ascension of Jesus Christ. God poured out His Spirit on the disciples, and over the next several days He “added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). These were repentant people who “gladly received” the truth of God and were baptized—symbolizing their acceptance of the sacrificial death of Christ for forgiveness of their sins and burial of their old sinful

ways.

Believers cannot simply “join” the Church the way you might a local congregation, members are placed by God into His Church. Jesus said, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him ...” (John 6:44), and “... unless it has been granted him from the Father” (v. 65). God initiates the calling and leads a person to repentance and baptism.

Christ is the Head of the Church, and all of its members are His begotten family. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath *begotten us again* unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3). “And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all” (Ephesians 1:22-23). These brothers in Christ make up “the body of Christ.”

It is the mission of the Church to preach the gospel (good news) of the coming Kingdom of God to all nations as a witness (Matthew 24:14), and help reconcile to God such people as are now being called. The Church does not make financial gain of the gospel, its outreach to the world is free of charge, “freely ye have received, freely give” (Matthew 10:8). The Church also has the responsibility to strengthen, edify, and nurture the children of God in the love and admonition of Jesus Christ.

The Church provides a powerful message of hope through its preaching work coupled with the combined testimony of the individual lives of its members. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

God gives each member of the Church spiritual gifts for the edification of the body. “Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But

the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal” (1 Corinthians 12:4-7). The Church also provides a haven for fellowship (Acts 2:42; 1 John 1:7), encouragement (Hebrews 3:13; 10:24), and spiritual nourishment (Ephesians 5:29; Colossians 2:19).

Members of God’s Church are His “special people” (Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:9), transformed by the renewing of their minds through the power of God’s Holy Spirit (Romans 12:2). Loving one another establishes their credibility as disciples of Jesus Christ. “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, *if ye have love one to another*” (John 13:34-35).

Christ promised His Church would never die (Matthew 16:18) and that He would never leave nor forsake His true followers (Hebrews 13:5). He promised to be with His people “even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20), empowering them to do His work. When Jesus returns to this earth to establish the Kingdom of God, His Church will rule with Him (Revelation 2:26; 3:21; 5:10; Daniel 7:22, 26-27), having become teachers and judges (1 Corinthians 6:1-3).

#### ARE YOU CALLED?

“[M]any are called, but few are chosen” (Matthew 22:14). If the issues discussed in this article have struck a nerve with you, it is possible God is calling you into a deeper understanding of His will. If you see the corruption in today’s religious organizations and in the actions of many professing Christians on this compound, know that you are not alone.

There will continue to be many among the Church who do not know God, all the way up to the return of Christ (Matthew 13:25-40). These are the ones that the world focuses on, “And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom *the way of truth* shall be evil spoken of” (Peter 2:2).

Not everyone who says they are your brother, nor every organization who claims to be the Church, is what they say. If you have attempted to apply Scriptural remedies to your problems with other professing Christians to no avail, the problem *is not* with the Scriptures.

Examine your heart today (2 Corinthians 13:5-8). Consider the actions of those you associate with (Luke 6:22; 1 Corinthians 5:11), as well as others who take to themselves the name of Christ. Can you see Him in them? Are they showing forth the fruits of His Spirit? (Galatians 5:19-23). Are you? ☞

If you are interested in learning more about the *way of life* that is Christianity, and the Church as it is described in the Bible, please request a free copy of *The Ten Commandments* and *The Church Jesus Built*. Both booklets will be sent to you absolutely free of charge, when you write to:

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