

TRUTH

“... Your word is truth” (John 17:17)

October 2024

THE CHURCH OF GOD

During our life on this earth, we often have opportunities to become a member of a group, club, or organization within our workplace or community. Those groups often do good works and strive to help fellow citizens with their basic needs. There is nothing inherently sinful about being a part of civic organization. However, in this article, we want to discuss an institution that is far more important than any earthly organization. If the church of God is that important, then we must study God’s word to understand exactly what it is and how it works.

First, let us notice that the church of God is **singular in nature**. In Matthew 16:18, when Christ made a promise to build His church, He mentioned only one. Paul would write that the church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22,23) and that there is one body (Ephesians 4:4). We live in a world where many people believe that a person should do whatever makes them happy, and that sentiment often includes choosing the church of their choice from hundreds of different so-called churches. But the Bible is clear that there is just one church that belongs to God.

On at least two different occasions, Paul writes using an illustration that makes sense to us as humans: we are many members, but we are part of one body (Romans 12:4,5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27). The church of God is made up of people who obey the gospel and who are then a part of the one church mentioned in the New Testament.

Secondly, let us notice the church of God has a **unique relationship with Jesus Christ**. Jesus *built* His church, just as He promised in Matthew 16:17-19. Jesus *purchased* the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28). Jesus *is the head* of the church (Ephesians 1:22). And, Jesus *is the foundation* of the church, even being the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:19-22). Many companies and earthly institutions have had issues over the centuries because they are based on human beings, and human beings are fallible and sinful. But to be a part of an institution that is based on Jesus the Christ should bring comfort and peace!

In the third place, it would help us to understand the importance of the church of God when we realize that Scripture teaches the **eternal nature** of the

church. Paul clearly speaks of this eternity as he writes to the Christians in Ephesus, “*just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world . . .*” (Ephesians 1:4). Also, later in the same epistle, he writes of the, “. . . *eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Ephesians 3:11). And as he writes to Titus, “*in hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began*” (Titus 1:2).

It is also important to note that the church of God is not only eternal in that it was in the mind and plan of God *before* the foundation of the world, but also it is eternal in that it will *never be destroyed* (Daniel 2:44). All throughout the history of the world, kingdoms of men have risen to prominence and fallen into ruin. How wonderful it is to be a part of “*...a kingdom which cannot be shaken . . .*” (Hebrews 12:28)!

Finally, if the church of God is such a great institution, as described above, then all mankind should be asking **how to be a part of it**. By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we read in Acts 2 about just how that is accomplished. Peter told the people assembled on that day that they were guilty of crucifying the Son of God and that they needed to be saved (Acts 2:36,40). Then Scripture tells us directly, “*Then those who gladly received his word were baptized . . .*” (Acts 2:41). The church is made up of saved people who have been baptized for the remission of their sins and are added to the church by the Lord (Acts 2:47).

God has given us this wonderful institution of His church, and He has also given us clear instructions on how we can be a part of it! This study can go so much further, and there are many other things that can be learned about the church of God, such as: its organizational structure, its purpose or mission, and the benefits that come with being a part of the church.

The church of God is described as the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15). Thanks be to God for such an institution that we can read about and then join in its work. And thanks be to God for His divine plan!

-- Joel Danley

TAKEAWAYS FROM EXODUS 23-24

All of Exodus 23-24 takes place at Mount Sinai. Israel's arrival at Sinai is recorded in chapter 19, and chapter 20 records the giving of the Ten Commandments to Israel through Moses. Before Moses ascends to the top of Sinai to speak with God (24:15-18), God gives numerous specific instructions to Israel through Moses; these begin in the latter part of chapter 20 and continue through chapter 23.

Before considering some takeaways from Exodus 23-24, it would be good to have a general overview of the contents of these chapters.

23:1-9 – **God commands justice for all people.**

God expects His people to be honest, to do right (even if it means not following the majority), to be impartial toward all, and to be kind to all (even their enemies).

23:10-13 – **God expounds on the Sabbath law.**

In addition to resting on the seventh day of each week, Israel was also commanded to let the land rest every seventh year. God reemphasizes the absolute necessity of avoiding any and all forms of idolatry as well.

23:14-19 – **God gives instructions about feasts.**

Israel was to keep three feasts each year: the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering. The Feast of Unleavened Bread is also known as Passover (Exodus 12), the Feast of Harvest is also known as the Feast of Weeks (Exodus 34:22), and the Feast of Ingathering is also known as the Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:34). For these feasts, all Jewish males were to “*appear before the Lord GOD*” (Exodus 23:17), and verses 18-19 strictly warn: no hint of idolatry was to be present in their worship.

23:20-33 – **God will send His Angel with Israel.**

In other words, God promises to be with Israel every step of the way as they come into the Promised Land. If they obeyed, God would be with them and be a shield about them. If they disobeyed, however, such would be their downfall.

24:1-18 – **Israel agrees to God's covenant.**

Before ascending Mount Sinai, Moses tells God's words to Israel and reads the Book of the Covenant to the people. Upon their agreement to obey the Lord, Moses consecrated the covenant with blood. The chapter closes with Moses atop Sinai, where he will receive tablets of stone with Israel's special law.

With the historical events summarized, what specifics might we consider as takeaways for us?

- ✓ “*You shall not follow a crowd to do evil*” (23:2). We simply cannot trust the majority as a safe guide. Jesus also emphasized this truth (Matthew 7:13,14). The only safe path is to follow God and His Word (1 Corinthians 15:1,2), even if such means standing alone.

- ✓ “*You shall not show partiality to a poor man in his dispute*” (23:3). Whether toward poor or rich, great or small, partiality is wrong. God is impartial, and He expects His people to be such. Paul urged Timothy to be impartial (1 Timothy 5:21), and James said that heavenly wisdom involves impartiality (James 3:17).
 - ✓ “*Also you shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt*” (23:9). This reminds us of Jesus' “Golden Rule” (as it is often called), recorded in Matthew 7:12 – “*Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them.*” In other words, do unto others as you would have them to do unto you.
 - ✓ The command to “*be circumspect and make no mention of the name of other gods, nor let it be heard from your mouth*” (23:13) is still just as true today as when God spoke to Israel.
 - ✓ “*None shall appear before Me empty*” (23:15). When humans come before the Almighty God, let us be certain not to do so empty-handed! Let us bring an offering of our worship, our hearts—yea, our very lives (Romans 12:1-2).
 - ✓ “*You shall make no covenant with them, nor with their gods*” (23:32). God's people must have zero fellowship with those who are out of fellowship with and disobedient to God. Paul reminds Christians, “*Come out from among them and be separate*” (2 Corinthians 6:17).
 - ✓ “*All the words which the LORD has said we will do*” (24:3). What did Israel agree to here?
 - “*All*” is not some or most; it is **ALL**.
 - “*Words*” indicate instruction received.
 - “*The LORD*” was the all-powerful authority behind the words received.
 - “*We*” indicates personal commitment.
 - “*Will do*” is a promise to obey God.
- If only Israel had kept their word! When one obeys the gospel today, he makes this same promise. Will we go back on our word like Israel, or will we learn from their mistakes?
- ✓ Finally, consider Moses' dedication of the covenant with blood (24:6-8). May we ever remember that we now have a **better** sacrifice: the blood Jesus offered on our behalf (Hebrews 9:18-23). Let us never take that sacrifice for granted and determine: “*All the words which the LORD has said we will do.*” Let us learn from Israel's mistakes and keep that promise faithfully!

-- Chad Dollahite

Overcoming Prejudice and Racism

All of us have unpleasant experiences in life. It is part of being a human. Some of our unpleasant experiences or observations of other people's behavior may involve someone of a different culture, different ethnic group, or different skin color.

How do you respond when someone who does not look, speak, smell, or behave like you does something which you deem to be inappropriate? Do you detest that person just because he is different? Do you disrespect and put a label on *every single* person in a group just because one or some of them misbehave?

Prejudice and racism are ugly. I have lived in four different countries of the world, and in each of them, I have witnessed racial prejudice. It does not matter who is involved, it always makes me sad. Angry, too. It especially disappoints me when I observe brethren in the Lord treating others or talking about them with obvious racial prejudice. Friend, it is no joking matter.

Some who once had a heart filled with dislike for all folks of another culture or another race have moved past such an attitude. They have had their eyes opened and grown out of it. Good for them. What can help you and me to overcome prejudice and racism?

Remember how our Lord wants us to treat others, *all* others: "*And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise*" (Luke 6:31). If I do not want others showing racial prejudice toward me, then I should not treat them that way, either.

Remember that all of us are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26,27). Yes, humans are different from one another, but we all are of equal value in the eyes of our Creator. None of us are "worthless trash."

Meditate on the reality that God loves the world, that is, He loves every single person (John 3:16). No, He does not approve of each choice humans make, but His love is unconditional. "*Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love . . .*" (Ephesians 5:1,2). One of the ways we can imitate God is to love all people in the same way He does.

"*God shows no partiality*" (Acts 10:34), and He expects the same of us: "*My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality . . . if you show partiality, you commit sin . . .*" (James 2:1,9). When I understand that God opposes prejudice and racism, that helps motivate me to avoid them and keep them out of my heart.

Look at how Jesus treated others. He dealt with Roman authorities, Jewish authorities, Samaritans, Gentiles, and common Jews. He showed respect and kindness to all. You and I must strive to do the same.

-- Roger D. Campbell

Why was Crispus not required to be baptized like other Corinthians were?

On one of his preaching journeys, the apostle Paul spent at least eighteen months teaching God's gospel in the city of Corinth. During that time, a number of those who heard the truth were converted to Jesus, and thus God's church was established there.

Crispus was one of those who was converted in Corinth. The message of Acts 18:8 causes some to ask why it was not necessary for him to be baptized. Here is what we read in that Bible text: "*Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.*"

On the surface, it may look like other Corinthians were saved by hearing, believing, and being baptized (three conditions of salvation), but Crispus was saved simply by believing (one condition), and he was not baptized. How is that fair? Let us pose and ponder four questions about the case of Crispus.

First, does God show partiality, that is, is He a respecter of persons? Here is the irrefutable answer to that question: "*For there is no partiality with God*" (Romans 2:11). Apply that to being saved from sin: what God requires one person to do in order to be saved, He requires of all others. Letting someone "get off easier" by doing less, is not how the Lord operates.

Second, was Crispus baptized? The book of Acts does not say that he was . . . neither does it affirm that he was *not* baptized. In fact, when Paul later wrote a letter to the church in Corinth, he stated that he had baptized Crispus: "*I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius . . .*" (1 Corinthians 1:14). Yes, Crispus was baptized.

In the book of Acts, when we read that someone believed, and no other salvation conditions are specified, what does the term "believed" indicate? Crispus "believed" (18:8). In Jerusalem, many "believed" (4:4), and Jesus' followers were described as "*those who believed*" (4:32). When the Bible speaks about a person's conversion and the word "believed" is used by itself, the term "to believe" stands for all that a lost person must do in order to be saved. It includes hearing the gospel, repentance, and baptism. In such cases, "believed" is equal to being "*obedient to the faith*" (Acts 6:7).

In other Bible passages, what is revealed about the purpose of water baptism? Its purpose is to receive the remission/forgiveness of sins (2:38), also called washing away sins (22:16). So, like others, Crispus was required to be baptized for the remission of sins.

-- Roger D. Campbell

THE PARABLE OF THE RICH FOOL

We can find this parable of the Master in only one Bible passage — Luke 12:16-21. The story involves only one person — a wealthy farmer. God labeled him as a “fool,” so one of our tasks in studying the parable is to try and understand what made this guy foolish.

In what context did Jesus teach this parable? As Jesus was teaching His disciples (12:1-12), a man interrupted Him to request that He tell the man’s brother to divide an inheritance with him (21:13). The matter which the man mentioned was a personal issue between him and his brother, but from Jesus’ statements and the parable He told, it is obvious that covetousness was a factor for one or both of the brothers.

The parable is directly connected with the message of verse fifteen, where we read these words of Jesus: “*Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.*” Immediately after saying that, “*Then He spoke a parable to them*” (12:16). Jesus used this story of a rich, foolish farmer to show that (1) we must be on guard against covetousness, and (2) a person’s life and character are not determined by how many material possessions he has, so we must be careful about our attitude toward material things.

Do you recall the actual parable? Here it is: “Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: ‘The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’ So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you, then whose will those things be which you have provided?’” (Luke 12:16-20).

What did this rich fellow do which showed that he was unwise? First, notice some things that he did which were *not* wrong. He was a farmer, He had crops, his ground produced plentifully, he had barns, he decided to build bigger barns, he was rich, and he realized he had a soul. None of those were sinful.

He was foolish because he enjoyed having blessings, but he failed to remember God and give Him thanks. There is no indication that God was in his life, his thinking, or his plans. Failing to put God first is a huge mistake! (Matthew 6:33).

He was not wise because he was self-centered and seemed to think only about himself. Notice how many times he used the words “I” and “my” in this story. He calls everything his, and he thinks of himself as the lord and producer of it all. The truth is, we all are

stewards of what God has given us, which is life, breath, and all things (Acts 17:25).

There is no indication that the rich farmer ever considered how he might use his material blessings to help others. When one is rich in material goods, God wants him to use those things to be rich in good works (1 Timothy 6:17,18).

He was foolish because he thought material goods could satisfy his soul and bring happiness (12:19). Money does not cause one to be in the right relationship with the Lord. The man certainly was rich (12:16), but he was also a fool (12:20). While money is number one in the thinking of many, there are so many things that money cannot provide — happiness, health, peace of mind, love, patience, and salvation. Happy is the one who is “*rich toward God*” (12:21).

He further demonstrated his foolish mind by allowing his things/wealth to deceive him into thinking that he had control over time. He assumed he still had “many years” left in his life (12:19). Because none of us is guaranteed that we will be alive another day, we should not boast about tomorrow (Proverbs 27:1). We must live our lives one day at a time, because that one day . . . today, is all that we have.

Let us come back to the topic of covetousness. Again, the Christ said to beware of it (Luke 12:15). I once read that about one out of every six verses in the gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) deals with man and his possessions, along with our attitude toward them. Jesus knew that covetousness is a very serious problem in every age. The people of the twenty-first century are not the first ones to face it!

Just what is covetousness? It is not the possession of wealth. It is not the desire to have possessions. It is not the desire to make money or to have more stuff. In the New Testament, covetousness means “a greedy desire to have more” [Thayer, word no 4124 via e-Sword]. Covetousness is the unlawful desire for earthly goods and riches, with the idea that these can bring satisfaction and that we do not want to go on living without them. Bible characters whose covetous heart doomed them include Achan (Joshua 7:21), Elisha’s servant Gehazi (2 Kings 5:22-27), Balaam, and other false teachers (2 Peter 2:1-3,14).

Friend, covetousness is idolatry (Colossians 3:5), and covetous people cannot inherit God’s kingdom (1 Corinthians 6:9,10). That ought to get our attention!

-- Roger D. Campbell

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