

The Sure Word Bible Studies
Lesson 18

The Church

In the New Testament the English word "church" is translated from the Greek word "ekklesia" which basically means "an assembly." In the Old Testament, the words "convocation" or "congregation" is used instead of the word "church." The Hebrew word from which they are translated is "miqra" which means "called out - as a public meeting," similiar to the Greek word "ekklesia." Note the way it is used in Leviticus Chapter 23.

Leviticus 23:3 *"Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work on it; it is the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings."*

In this verse the Bible says we are to have a holy "convocation," meaning a meeting together, an assembly, or gathering, on the seventh-day Sabbath. It is God's plan for His people to assemble together on the Sabbath and should not be neglected. Note what the Bible says -

Hebrews 10:24,25 *"And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."*

Matthew 18:20 *"For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."*

The church, meaning the collective body of people who have responded to God's calling, are to be held in great respect for they are the object upon which Christ bestows His supreme regard, calling them His "Bride."

Believers become members of His body, the two become as "one" and have been divested with divine authority by Christ.

Matthew 18:18 *"Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."*

This does not mean that the Church has been given the authority to modify or change God's word as some have done. The Bible says, *"For ever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven"* (Psalms 119:89).

What Jesus is saying in Matthew 18 and in similar texts is that the Church will be in complete harmony with heaven's principles as taught in God's Word and that it has the authority to administer that Word, but only within the body itself, the church has no authority over those "in the world."

Today there is *the visible* and the *invisible* church. The *invisible* church is composed of all God's people throughout the world whether or not they belong to any organized religious institution. The *visible* church is God's organized church, a group of people organized for service. The organization enables it to better fulfill the great commission, *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature"* (Mark 16:15).

Even though many feel that organized religion is not needed, the fact is that without organization it is very difficult for any institution or movement to prosper. It is also important as to what kind of governmental organization the Church utilizes. There are four basic forms of church government.

1) Episcopal - Church government and authority is vested in its ministry, usually with three orders of ministers, as bishops, priests, and deacons.

2) Papal - Church government in which supreme authority is vested in an individual such as the pope. From him, cardinals,

archbishops, bishops, and priests govern the church. The local church or church member has no authority in church administration. An example is the Roman Catholic Church.

3) Independent - Church government that makes the local church congregations supreme and final in its own domain. An example is the Southern Baptist Church.

4) Representative - Church government that recognizes that authority in the church rests in the church membership, with executive responsibility delegated to representative bodies and officers for the governing of the church. The leaders administer the policies of the church and do not make the policies.

An example is the Seventh-day Adventist Church which has a representative form of government and works within the "sisterhood of churches" - that is, each church is responsible to the others to adhere to certain biblical standards.

Often God leads His people from the invisible Church into union with His visible church. In the visible Church, many find they are more able to fully experience God's love and fellowship. Just as there can be no living, active human body unless all its members are united and functioning together under a central control, the human head, so there can be no living, growing, prospering church unless its members are organized into a body, all performing their God-given duties and functions under the direction of their divinely constituted head, Jesus Christ.

Thus God has given gifts to the Church in order to edify, build-up, comfort, and encourage, individually, as well as corporately.

I Corinthians 12:4 - 7 *"There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all:"*

Verses 25 - 27 *"That there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually."*

For a listing of specific gifts see both I Corinthians 12 and Romans 12. Those and other needed gifts are to be found in the Church. As members of the Church, all of us should ask God to show us our specific gift and make an effort to find the ministry God has in store for us.

Church members are to support the church not only with their spiritual gifts, time and talents, but also with financial support as well in tithes and offerings. This is a principle that goes back to the beginning. Just as the Sabbath was instituted before the law was given, so was the tithing principle. Abraham gave tithes long before Israel reached Mount Sinai.

Genesis 14:18 - 20 *"Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said: "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." And he gave him a tithe of all."*

The word tithe means tenth. The tithe of our total income God instructs to be set apart (the meaning of the word Holy) as His. This is the portion that we are to return to God.

Leviticus 27:30 *"And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD'S. It is holy to the LORD."*

Verse 32 *"And concerning the tithe of the herd or the flock, of whatever passes under the rod, the tenth one shall be holy to the LORD."*

Note in Malachi that God refers to tithes and offerings –

Malachi 3:8 - 10 *"Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' **In tithes and offerings.** You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this," Says the LORD of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing That there will not be room enough to receive it."*

There is the tithe which we "return" because it belongs to God, and then in addition, there is the opportunity to "give" offerings which are to be given from a heart of love as we desire and are able.

Deuteronomy 16:17 *"Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given you."*

Jesus confirmed the giving of the tithe in the New Testament.

Matthew 23:23 *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done (tithing), without leaving the others undone."*

The tithe is to be used to support the ministry of the church. This principle was established in the Old Testament. The tribe of Levi were the ministers of the tabernacle and were to be supported by the tithe -

Numbers 18:21 *"Behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tithes in Israel as an inheritance in return for the work which they perform, the work of the tabernacle of meeting."*

This principle is also found in the New Testament.

I Corinthians 9:13,14 *"Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel."*

The Bible says that God loves a cheerful giver. We should give cheerfully as Christians because the words of David are true – *"All things come of You, and of your own have we given You."* (I Chronicles 29:14) All things do come from God; we are only stewards of His property and goods.

Being part of the church and claiming to be Christians, that is, being Christ-like, the way we act, talk and dress is very important.

II Corinthians 5:18,20 *"Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, **we are ambassadors for Christ**, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God."*

As Christians, we are ambassadors, the representatives of Christ in this world. Next we will examine some of the guidance the Bible gives for the Christian living in our world today.

First, our speech should be honest and clear.

Matthew 5:33 - 37 *"Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.' But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair*

white or black. But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one."

We should be thoughtful about what we put into our minds.

Philippians 4:8 *"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy--meditate on these things."*

This applies to the music we listen to, the books we read, and the TV and movies we watch. These have great power of influence and the Christian should avoid music, novels, and shows with suggestive words, melodies, and pictures that bring thoughts of sex, drinking, drugs, and violence.

Movies and TV have a greater impact on the mind and life of an individual than does any other single activity in America. A clear biblical principal relating to this is found in Psalms -

Psalms 101:1 - 4 *"I will sing of mercy and justice; To You, O LORD, I will sing praises. I will behave wisely in a perfect way. Oh, when will You come to me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. I will set nothing wicked before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; It shall not cling to me. A perverse heart shall depart from me; I will not know wickedness."*

David says that he will do what is right even when he is at home and no one would know any different. He says he will set no wicked thing before his eyes because he knows that will eventually affect his mind and influence his character.

He says he will not "know" wickedness, or a wicked person. The word "know" in the Hebrew is "to esteem" or "idolize" a wicked person as some idolize some movie stars and sports heroes today. Sincere Christians will not "idolize" any man but *"the man Jesus Christ"*!

The committed Christian who wants to protect his mind will turn away from unwholesome, violent, sensual movies or TV programs, computer games, and novels.

These things are harmful in three ways:

1. They consume our time.
2. They influence us to do wrong.
3. The mind and health are wearied by over-stimulation.

A good rule to follow as a Christian is to ask yourself - If Jesus were with me would He approve?

Next, as Christians, the way we dress will reflect on Christ's good name; therefore we will dress moderately and modestly.

Christians do not do this as a legalistic requirement, but realizing we are His representatives in this world. The Bible gives us guidance on dress.

I Peter 3:3,4 *"Do not let your adornment be merely outward--arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel--rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God."*

I Timothy 2:9,10 *"In like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works."*

Christians, men or women, are not to mar the beauty of their characters with styles that arouse the "*lust of the flesh*" (dress provocatively) or the "*pride of life*" (with expensive worldly fashions). Christians will influence unbelievers, not by looking and acting like the world, but by revealing a refreshing difference!

Worldly fashions and jewelry have no purpose except that of prideful adornment. Much money is spent on fashion and luxury items that would be much better spent on spreading the gospel and helping the poor. Mother Teresa once said speaking of the poor and starving children in India –

“They don’t starve because God does not care for them. They starve because you and I don’t give, because you and I don’t care!”

If we are spending our money on fashionable and expensive clothes, houses, furniture, cars and other material goods, neglecting the church and the poor, what does that say about where our heart is? Jesus said –

Matthew 6:19 – 21 *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

It could be said the following way as well – *“Where your heart is, there your treasure will be also.”*

The Church is organized to accomplish God’s plan to fill this planet with the knowledge of His glory, grace and love. The visible church has the great responsibility to provide the number of functions vital to meeting this end. But to accomplish this, the church needs all its members actively involved. If you haven’t already, will you make that commitment today?

Response Questions:

1. Do you see the importance of church organization today?
Yes ___ No ___

2. Is it clear to you that offerings are to be given from a heart of love in addition to tithes?

Yes ___ No ___

3. Do you believe that God gives everyone a gift of the Spirit to enable them to be effective witnesses for Him?

Yes ___ No ___

4. Will you do your part so that you may hear the Lord say to you on that day – *“Well done, thou good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”*

Yes ___ No ___

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