

CHURCH

**What does “Church” mean? What is a Church?
What is God’s Church? Are ministers necessary in the Church?
What role does God’s Church play in God’s Plan of Salvation?
Do you need to belong to a Church?
What is the right name for God’s Church?**

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(All quotes are from the “The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible”)

Matt 16:18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.

What is the Greek word Jesus Christ, the Son of God used in the above verse? Is it important?

2 Tim 3:16-17 All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

John 10:35 If those to whom the word of God came were called ‘gods’—and the scripture cannot be annulled—

We see from the above two scriptures that all scriptures, every word of the original manuscripts of the Bible were inspired by God Almighty and cannot be broken. Therefore one should come to the conclusion that there is some importance to the words chosen by inspiration to give mankind the Truth of God.

The Greek word inspired to be used in Matthew 16:18 for “church” is “**ekklesia**”, number 1577 in *Strong’s Concordance*.

1577. ekklesia, ek-klay-see'-ah; from a comp. of G1537 and a der. of G2564; a calling out, i.e. (concr.) a popular meeting, espec. a religious congregation (Jewish synagogue, or Chr. community of members on earth or saints in heaven or both):--assembly, church.

This is the word used for church throughout the New Testament. At times, much “to do” has been made about people incorrectly referring to a building as “their church”. And in reality this is correct. As has been pointed out in the past, the building is not the church, but the people inside the building are the church. According to the Greek definition of the word for church, this would be a correct conclusion. **Notice that the definition of the word for church is a popular or known meeting of a group of people, a congregation, an assembly of people.**

Jesus Christ said He would build a congregation of His people and that Satan would never be able to completely destroy this assembled group of people. When God calls and chooses an individual and gives them spiritual understanding, where does God “send” those individuals for their spiritual edification?

Acts 2:47 praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Acts 20: 28 Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son.

The Greek word for flock means “group”. From the above scripture it can be observed that one of the purposes for having a ministry is to oversee, to feed the congregation, the assembly, a group of God’s people meeting together as a church. A flock of sheep is not individual sheep pursuing their own individual direction. A flock of sheep is a group of sheep closely feeding together in one area and cared for by a shepherd. One of the responsibilities of the shepherd is to keep the sheep together as a flock so he can protect and care for them. There is a reason why Jesus often used sheep and shepherds as an example to represent His people. Of course, the main shepherd, the Master Shepherd is

Jesus Christ Himself. All other shepherds are under the Master Shepherd and are warned to care for God's sheep as Jesus Christ Himself would do so. We will review such scriptures later in this article for proper balance on this topic.

John 10:11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

John 10:16 I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

Notice that Jesus states there are "other" sheep that He intends to work with. The tense of the verbs used in reference to this is the future tense. God has a time line for working with mankind; He is not trying to save all mankind at once. However, when He does work with these individuals, note that He will bring them into His One Fold.

Regarding shepherds, we know that Jesus calls or appoints other shepherds or ministers to watch over His flock. God is very upset with the shepherds who do not properly take care of His flock as stated in Ezekiel 34. One of the several things God brings against the shepherds of His people is that they don't gather the flock together to worship Him.

Eze 34:4 You have not strengthened the weak, you have not healed the sick, you have not bound up the injured, you have not brought back the strayed, you have not sought the lost, but with force and harshness you have ruled them. (The Living Bible has: nor gone looking for those who have wandered away and are lost.)

Eze 34:8 As I live, says the Lord GOD, because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild animals, since there was no shepherd; and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep;

God indicates that even though His sheep as a large group will become scattered, there will always be small true and faithful remnants, therefore fulfilling the scripture that "cannot be broken" as quoted from Matthew 16:18 previously.

Rom 9:27 And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, "Though the number of the children of Israel were like the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved;

Rom 11:1-5 I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? "Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars; I alone am left, and they are seeking my life." But what is the divine reply to him? "I have kept for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal." So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace.

Paul often attended the "Old Testament" church, or what we refer to as Jewish synagogues, looking to preach about Jesus Christ the Savior. Paul did not attend these services as a member or because he wished to become a member, but as an apostle to preach the word of God about the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Jewish synagogue services were different than services most Christians are used to today. The men who attended, especially if traveling from afar, were allowed and encouraged to share news from their travels and any Biblical message they would like to share with the whole congregation. Paul's intentions in doing this were to convert them over to becoming part of the "New Testament" body of Jesus Christ, which shall be shown, by the scriptures, to be the Church of God. When did they want to meet together, as an assembly? On the very next Sabbath (not Sunday) they gathered together in what could only be a church service.

Acts 13:14 but they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. And on the sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.

Acts 13:42 As Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people urged them to speak about these things again the next sabbath.

Acts 17:2 And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three sabbath days argued with them from the scriptures,

Acts 18:4 Every sabbath he would argue in the synagogue and would try to convince Jews and Greeks.

Paul, as God's apostle to the Gentiles, worked primarily with the Churches of God. The apostles certainly preached in public on occasions, but then *always* invited those individuals who would listen to come to church on the Sabbath day. While the word church is not used in the next scripture, the work congregation is used to indicate a group of worshippers. Notice that almost the whole city *came together* to hear the word of God.

Acts 13:42-44 As Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people urged them to speak about these things again the next sabbath. When the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and urged them to continue in the grace of God. The next sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.

God repeats Himself many times in the Bible to emphasize His message. Consider again the point made in the above paragraph, the apostle Paul worked primarily with the Churches of God. The Church of God was a group of scattered, small churches, often meeting in the home of one of the members. The churches were small and scattered, but each local church was a congregation. Through their common beliefs and the Spirit Power of God, they were One Church, One Faith, One Body. We have the history of Paul and the other apostles working with the church in the book of Acts. Paul wrote most of his epistles to churches. Paul worked with the Churches of God.

1 Cor 4:17 For this reason I sent you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ Jesus, as I teach them everywhere in every church.

Col 4:16 And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea.

Not several point from 1 Cor 4:17. Timothy was being sent by Paul to the Church at Corinth to remind them of what Paul had taught them. There was no official New Testament canon with the books of the Bible as we know them at this time. Paul received his understanding through revelation from Jesus Christ and told people to follow him as he followed Christ. The second point is that Paul did his teaching and preaching to believers everywhere he went in the assembly or congregation of God.

1 Cor 11:1 Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

Gal 1:11-12 For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

God gives His people gifts, different spiritual abilities. For what purpose? To edify the church, the congregation or assembly of people gathering together to worship God. Notice from this chapter of the gift of tongues that the church gathers together in one place, that is for the city of Corinth. God expects His spiritual gifts to be used in an orderly fashion in all churches, to edify the saints.

1 Cor 14:12 So with yourselves; since you are eager for spiritual gifts, strive to excel in them for building up the church.

1 Cor 14:23 If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your mind?

1 Cor 14:33 for God is a God not of disorder but of peace. (As in all the churches of the saints,

What is the responsibility that Paul felt in performing the ministry of God? It was the care of all God's churches.

2 Cor 11:28 And, besides other things, I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches.

The Church belongs to God the Father. He has purchased it, bought it, with the blood of Jesus Christ. He has set Jesus Christ as the head of the Church, the collective body of individuals that make up the congregation or assembly of God. Notice that the "body of Jesus" is The Church. The word for church is, as usual, the Greek word for a congregation or assembly of people gathered together to worship God. Also notice that it states that Jesus died for "the Church" and that Jesus loved "the Church". Biblical references to the people of God and their relationship with God and Jesus is via "the Church". The Church is an important part of the plan of God relative to how He brings salvation to mankind. This is something that not all people can understand, it is part of the mystery of God. Notice how these important points are stated in the following inspired scriptures.

Acts 20:28 Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son.

Eph 1:22-23 And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Eph 5:23-32 For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind—yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, because we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church.

Some say they belong to the “body of Christ”, but don’t need to be part of any church congregation of the Churches of God. However, the inspired scriptures of God state that the body of Christ **is** the Church, the congregation, the assembly. This point has already been made in Ephesians 1:22-23 and is repeated twice in Colossians for emphasis, something we should then give serious consideration.

Col 1:18 He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.

Col 1:24 I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.

The book of revelation is a book of prophecy, events that were to occur in the future from when it was written. It was written to seven churches, representing seven eras of God’s church down to the end time. It was not written just for seven churches that existed when it was written. In this case, the prophetic message is dual – for those churches that existed then and subsequent church eras. The messages to these seven churches should also be heeded as warnings about seven phases or attitudes a Christian or a church in general can experience in their commitment to God, some good, some not so good. Regardless of your particular belief on this point, notice that the book of Revelation is not addressed to scattered Christians who don’t attend a church. It is addressed to the servants of God in those seven churches.

Rev 1:1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place; he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John,

Rev1:4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne,

We know these seven churches represent eras of God’s Church because the whole book of Revelation is a prophecy and historical events are associated with these seven churches that eventually bring us forward to the return of Jesus Christ. For instance, how could God’s promise in Revelation 3:10 to spare the Philadelphian Church from the “**hour of trial that is coming on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth**” just before Jesus’ Second Coming apply to that church of the Apostle John’s time? Of course, one should not expect people who are in the Laodicean Church to believe in church eras, who would want to believe or admit they are a lukewarm Christian that God will spew out of His mouth (Revelation 3:16).

One of the concluding scriptures of the Bible is a quote from Jesus. Jesus says that His message is sent to the Church. The Church is important to God the Father and Jesus Christ. Jesus died for the Church. God the Father “paid” for the Church with the blood of Jesus. The body of Christ is the Church. The spiritual messages of the Bible were inspired to be read in the Churches of God. Jesus sent His message to the Church. Jesus said His Church would never be destroyed. One would have to come to the conclusion based on these scriptures that the Church, the Congregation, the Assembly of believers is of great importance in God’s dealings with mankind.

Rev 22:16 It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.

Jesus also attended the Church of God on the Sabbath day, the “Old Testament” church before His “New Testament” church began as recorded in the book of Acts. Even though Jesus was the Son of God, He apparently felt it necessary to set us an example of attending the Congregation of Israel, the Church of God of His day, until He established the New Testament after His death and resurrection. If a Christian is going to follow the example of Jesus Christ, then they will find and attend the Church of God.

Luke 4:16 When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read,

WHAT IS GOD’S PURPOSE FOR HAVING A CHURCH?

God has a reason for establishing His Church. Many reasons. If an individual does not search for a True Church of God in order to associate with such a True Church or ignores church all together, then that person will suffer spiritual loss for the very reasons God established His Church. Note the strong language of the next scripture. God works through His Church. He uses His Church as the source of His Truth.

1 Tim 3:15 if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth.

How does God work with His people? While we all have a direct relationship with God, God does work through “tools”. God says He uses a ministry to give understanding to His people. God says He must send the minister. God says He sets the ministry in His Church. God also states that not everyone listens to, believes or obeys what He inspires His ministers to preach. We do not decide how to obey God nor do we get to tell God how we want Him to work with us. Our only decision is whether we will follow the will of God or not. The question each of us needs to ask ourselves then relative to His Church and ministry is not whether we need God’s Church, because God says He works through a ministry in His Church, but have we found a Church where God has sent the ministry with His Truth.

Rom 10:14-16 But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” But not all have obeyed the good news; for Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?”

1 Cor 12:28 And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues.

Jesus Christ Himself says in the book of Hebrews that He declares the Name of God the Father to the people in the Church. Jesus, as Head of the Church of His Father, works with His Church.

Heb 2:9,12 But we do see Jesus, ... saying, “I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.”

Jesus also states that His Father will grant access to the Family or Kingdom of God to the flock.

Luke 12:31-32 Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

It is generally accepted that in Bible symbolism, Israel or Judah represents physical Israel in prophecy. Mount Zion and Jerusalem represent spiritual Israel or the Church of God. With that in mind, we see in the following scripture that Paul refers to Jerusalem above, which would represent spiritual Israel or the Church, as the mother of us all. This is important in comparison with other analogies about the Kingdom of God. We are to be “born” into the Kingdom or Family of God. The Church is our mother through which we receive our nourishment and protection while in the “womb” until we are actually born into God’s Family by the resurrection of the dead.

Gal 4:26 But the other woman corresponds to the Jerusalem above; she is free, and she is our mother.

We also learn from several scriptures that Jesus Christ will marry the Church. It would therefore seem very important to be part of that True Church of God or one might not be a participant in the marriage ceremony that represents the receiving of eternal salvation.

2 Cor 11: 2 I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I promised you in marriage to one husband, to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

Eph 5: 25-27 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind—yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish.

Rev 19:7-9 Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready; to her it has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure”— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are true words of God.”

Rev 21: 2 And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

DO YOU NEED TO ATTEND A CHURCH?

When True Christians are commanded to gather together, do they have to meet in some large building? No. We see from the next scripture that New Testament churches were small enough to meet in the homes of some of the members.

Rom 16:5 Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first convert in Asia for Christ.

1 Cor 16:19 The churches of Asia send greetings. Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, greet you warmly in the Lord.

Col 4:15 Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters in Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.

Philemon 1:2 to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:

What is the *only* example given in the New Testament for True Christians and the Church of God? It is *always* a congregation, however small that might be! In fact, the people of God were attending the Church of God long before they were called Christians. The word Christians came about to refer to people who were already attending the Congregation or Church of God.

Acts 11:26 and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for an entire year they met with the church and taught a great many people, and it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called “Christians.”

Paul was inspired to know the importance of God’s people gathering together as a church to worship God. When one puts all the scriptures together about God’s Church, it should be plain that God works through His Church, He reveals His Truth to His Church, God charges His Church with the responsibility of maintaining that foundation of Truth and that God will present salvation to mankind through His Church. The Church is a key component in God’s relationship with those whom He calls and chooses. God expects these individuals to attend His Church on a consistent basis.

Heb 10:25 And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Obviously, there are cases where scattered individual may live too far away from the nearest congregation of true believers. Also, at times, one may be traveling where there are no such congregations. The scriptures don’t describe

every possible situation. But what they do state is that we should not consistently reject gathering together with other true believers.

HOW MANY DIFFERENT CHURCH ORGANIZATIONS DOES GOD HAVE?

John 10:16 I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

John 17:11 And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

John 17:21-23 that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Rom 12:4-5 For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.

1 Cor 10:17 Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

1 Cor 12:12-13 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

1 Cor 12:20 As it is, there are many members, yet one body.

Eph 4:3-6 making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the 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 all.

Col 3:15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.

We can obviously see from the scriptures quoted here and in other New Testament examples that there were many individual churches in the different cities of the Roman Empire. Yet they were united in spirit and beliefs. One member could travel from one city to another and attend church, and still be in the same Church of God, the same body of Jesus Christ, just at another location. We have also seen that some, if not many, of these churches met in the home of one of the members. While it does not specifically state that these churches that met in someone's home were small, it is a safe conclusion that they were.

Not only was Paul inspired to write about the oneness of Christ, he also warned against division within the Church of God.

1 Cor 1:10 Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose.

1 Cor 1:13 Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

1 Cor 12:25 that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another.

It should be obvious from these scriptures that there should be a unity and harmony among the individual Church of God congregations making it "one body". A church body unified in doctrine of beliefs. This church, or group of individual church congregations, would have one purpose and one goal – to do the will of God in seeking first the

Kingdom of God. When one sees various church organizations involved in politics (without and within the church), the building of grandiose corporations to do “a work” based on the human efforts of men, with no two organizations agreeing on how to do this nor can they agree on a unified set of beliefs -- how can any of them claim to be “at one” with each other as would please God? Where is the spirit of unity that the Bible says would exist in the True Church of God? Sadly, this spirit of unity is lacking among the Churches of God in this end time period. We should ask the question, “Why?” Unity comes through the power of God’s Holy Spirit. Divisions within the Church of God started and continued after Pentecost was changed from a Monday to a Sunday. Pentecost represents the pouring out of the Holy Spirit within God’s Church. When considering these facts and taking into consideration the parable of the “10 virgins” found in Matthew 25, individuals within the various Church of God congregations should do some serious soul searching and reevaluation of where they stand in their doctrinal relationship with God the Father and Jesus the Christ.

HOW DO YOU DETERMINE IF A CHURCH IS ONE OF GOD’S TRUE CHURCH CONGREGATIONS

God’s True Church has always been small compared to other religions. It is the nature of God’s plan of salvation. To understand this is to understand the whole plan of God’s salvation for mankind. God calls this a mystery that He has revealed to only a few. God will save the vast majority of mankind in the “second half” of His plan, the main harvest. Right now God is only working with a few firstfruits compared to the total population of the earth.

Matt 7:13-14 Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Matt 13:10-11 Then the disciples came and asked him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” He answered, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.

Matt 20:16 So the last shall be first, and the first last; for many are called but few are chosen.

Matt 22:14 For many are called, but few are chosen.

Luke 12: 32 Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

Luke 13:23-24 Someone asked him, “Lord, will only a few be saved?” He said to them, “Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able.

Isa 51:1-2 Listen to me, all who hope for deliverance, who seek the Lord! Consider the quarry from which you were mined, the rock from which you were cut! Yes, think about your ancestors Abraham and Sarah, from whom you came. You worry at being so small and few, but Abraham was only *one* when I called him. But when I blessed him, he became a great nation. (The Living Bible)

James 1:18 In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

Rev 14:4 It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins; these follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They have been redeemed from humankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb,

Consequently, in looking for a True Church of God, one does not look for a “big” church. Nor would you expect God’s True Church to be well known and popular in the eyes of the world.

God has allowed mankind to go their own way, the way of death, for six thousand years. After six thousand years, Jesus Christ will return in the glory of His Second Coming. At that time He will then bring peace and salvation to mankind. Again, this plan of God’s salvation is a mystery to the whole world. A great deal of understanding this mystery comes from keeping God’s seven Holy Days, something the world at large rejects.

Rom 11:25 So that you may not claim to be wiser than you are, brothers and sisters, I want you to understand this mystery: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.

Rom 16:25 Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages

1 Cor 2:7-8 But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

Eph 3:3-5 and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit:

Eph 3:9 and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things;

Eph 5:32 This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church.

Col 1:26 the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints.

The current world we live in is deceived. God has not revealed the mystery of salvation to them at this time. We also see warnings that some who know the truth will depart from the truth.

John 12:37-40 Although he had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in him. This was to fulfill the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah: "Lord, who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" And so they could not believe, because Isaiah also said, "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, so that they might not look with their eyes, and understand with their heart and turn — and I would heal them."

1 Cor 3:19-20 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."

2 Cor 4: 4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

2 Thess 2:3 Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the lawless one is revealed, the one destined for destruction.

1 Tim 4:1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will renounce the faith by paying attention to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,

2 Tim 4:3-4 For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths.

1 John 5: 19 We know that we are God's children, and that the whole world lies under the power of the evil one.

Rev 12: 9 The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

In reality there never has been a "perfect" Church of God. That is because the church is an assembly of human beings striving to be Christians. No human being has ever been a perfect Christian. Therefore, you cannot expect to find a perfect church. We see from the New Testament scriptures that Paul wrote his epistles to churches that were having problems and not properly following the laws and principles of Jesus Christ's teachings. Yet they were the Churches of God. We also see from the book of Revelation, chapters two and three, that God is more pleased with some of His churches than others.

We have already seen that God's inspired scriptures say there is only One God, One Savior, One Faith, One Spirit, One Body or Church of God. One should ask themselves if there is only One Body or Church of God, how then can

all the different organizations that claim to be God's Church all be part of the One True and Faithful Church of God and yet have a wide disparity of beliefs (not One Faith) and will not cooperate nor act in unity and harmony with other churches (not One Body)? Our individual challenge is to be "True Christian" regardless of which church congregation we attend. However, obviously, we should strive to find a Christian congregation that follows the teachings and example Jesus Christ set for us as closely as possible.

God's True Church will be attended by God's True and Faithful Christians and served by a True and Faithful Ministry. Without these two "ingredients", you cannot have a True Church of God. The next two sections will address these topics.

WHAT IS THE BIBLE'S DEFINITION OF A TRUE CHRISTIAN?

There are many scriptures that could be quoted to help define a True Christian. Why does this article use the word "True" so often when referring to Christians, ministers or the Church of God? This is because there is a great number of people claiming to be Christians, and while this is a good thing, most only follow the doctrines and message Jesus preach in part. This article chooses to refer to "True Christians" as those to whom God has revealed understanding of all of His mysterious plan of salvation and they strive to obey all of God's laws and commandments.

The Apostle John addressed this issue with simple statements from Jesus and his inspired reprise latter in his own life.

John 14:15 "If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

John 14:21 They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

John 14:22-23 Jesus answered him, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

1 John 2:3-6 Now by this we may be sure that we know him, if we obey his commandments. Whoever says, "I have come to know him," but does not obey his commandments, is a liar, and in such a person the truth does not exist; but whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. By this we may be sure that we are in him: whoever says, "I abide in him," ought to walk just as he walked.

The definition of a "True Christian" is therefore a simple one. It is one who follows the example of how Jesus lived His life – how Jesus kept the laws of God including the ten commandments, Sabbath and Holy Days. Jesus also gave us the two great commandments: to love God with all our heart, mind and soul, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. It is a simple definition, but one that is a lifetime challenge to pursue. A difficult challenge indeed for Christians living at the end of six thousand years of human history.

A CHALLENGE FOR END-TIME CHRISTIANS

This article has already quoted some Bible scriptures that warn the reader to beware, for there will be a departing from the truth in the end time just before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. There is also the warning to the Laodicean Church. While Christians are told to "grow in grace and knowledge" there is never a warning in the Bible against individuals who are Christians already who refuse to accept "new truth". All the New Testament scriptures specific for established Christians, not the deceived world, are warnings not to depart from, water down or let go of the truth they have already received.

1 Cor 15:2 through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain.

Phil 2:16 It is by your holding fast to the word of life that I can boast on the day of Christ that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

1 Thess 5:21 but test everything; hold fast to what is good;

2 Thess 2:15 So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter.

1 Tim 6:20-21 Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you. Avoid the profane chatter and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge; by professing it some have missed the mark as regards the faith.

2 Tim 1:13 Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

Titus 1:9 holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict. (New Kings James Version)

Heb 2:1 Therefore we must pay greater attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it.

Heb 3: 6 Christ, however, was faithful over God's house as a son, and we are his house if we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope.

Heb 3: 14 For we have become partners of Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end.

Heb 4: 14 Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession.

Heb 10:23 Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful.

Heb 10:32 But recall those earlier days when, after you had been enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings,

1 John 2:24 Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father.

2 John 1:5-6 But now, dear lady, I ask you, not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but one we have had from the beginning, let us love one another. And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment just as you have heard it from the beginning—you must walk in it.

Jude 1:3-4 Beloved, while eagerly preparing to write to you about the salvation we share, I find it necessary to write and appeal to you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. For certain intruders have stolen in among you, people who long ago were designated for this condemnation as ungodly, who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Rev 2:5 Remember then from what you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

Rev 2:13 I know where you are living, where Satan's throne is. Yet you are holding fast to my name, and you did not deny your faith in me ...

Rev 3:3 Remember then what you received and heard; obey it, and repent. If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you.

Rev 3:11 I am coming soon; hold fast to what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND THE MINISTRY?

Acts 14:23 And after they had appointed elders for them in each church, with prayer and fasting they entrusted them to the Lord in whom they had come to believe.

Rom 10:13-15 For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

1 Cor 4:1-2 Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God’s mysteries. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.

1 Cor 12:28 And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues.

2 Cor 1:24 I do not mean to imply that we lord it over your faith; rather, we are workers with you for your joy, because you stand firm in the faith.

2 Cor 8:23 As for Titus, he is my partner and co-worker in your service; as for our brothers, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ.

Eph 3:3-5 and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit:

Eph 4:11-13 The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

1 Tim 3:8-9 Deacons likewise must be serious, not double-tongued, not indulging in much wine, not greedy for money; they must hold fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

One should learn several spiritual points from the above scriptures. God works through a ministry. God’s uses His ministry as the keepers and stewards of His Truth. This truth is only understood by the revelation of God to His ministry. God then uses or works through His ministry as a tool to reveal His Truth to the flock, the congregation or assembly, The Church.

God set ministers in His Church, not outside the Church. The ministry of God and the Church of God go together. You cannot separate them. You cannot have one without the other. It takes three “ingredients” in order to have a true Church of God:

- (1) The inspiration and direction of God the Father, the owner and creator of the Church, and Jesus Christ, the only Head of the Church
- (2) A ministry called of God and ordained to care for the flock
- (3) A congregation or assembly of church members

We have already read from several scriptures that God sets and works through a ministry in His Church. Notice that Paul states the members should stand fast and hold to the traditions as they had been taught by his preaching. In order to understand the Bible correctly, one has to correctly put together ALL the scriptures on a topic, not just one isolated verse. Using spiritual logic, we would put this together with what Paul said about following him, as he followed Christ. Paul also told the church to prove all things. And he also said listen to him, because his gospel came to him by the revelation of Christ.

One more consideration relative to this topic is the book of Malachi. Malachi is one of the “minor prophets” of the Old Testament. The book of Malachi is an indictment against Israel and her priest. As a book of prophecy, prophecy often being “dual” in nature, many understand this book to be an indictment against Laodicean-type Christians and ministers. Chapter two concerns the priesthood, or modern-day minister in God’s Church. God warns against ministers who have not continued to preach the True knowledge, but they have not. Therefore God says He would make the ministry base and contemptible in the eyes’ of His people. Indeed many Christians have lost respect for God’s ministry because of the many changes they have instituted and the bickering between different organizations.

Mal 2:7-9 For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.⁸ But you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by your instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the LORD of hosts,⁹ and so I make you despised and abased before all the people, inasmuch as you have not kept my ways but have shown partiality in your instruction.

One should remember, however, Jesus statement that nothing would cause His church to cease. Therefore, while one may have to conduct a diligent search, one should be able to find a church with a ministry that does follow all of the Father's laws and commandment. It is a promise from God Himself

HOW CAN YOU OBEY ALL THE COMMANDMENTS IF THERE IS NO CONGREGATION OR ASSEMBLY OR YOU CHOOSE NOT TO ASSOCIATE WITH THE CHURCH OF GOD

Some of God's commands and spiritual principles are impossible to obey and follow if one does not find a church to attend. The Sabbath and Holy Days are rehearsed in Leviticus 23. Notice that there is a command from God to have a "holy convocation". Have can you have a "holy convocation" if you do not find other Christians of like mind to gather together for an assembly? It may only be a few people, but nonetheless, Christians are commanded to attend a "holy convocation" on the Sabbath and Holy Days as a general practice.

Lev 23:2 Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: These are the appointed festivals of the LORD that you shall proclaim as holy convocations, my appointed festivals.

Lev 23:4 These are the appointed festivals of the LORD, the holy convocations, which you shall celebrate at the time appointed for them.

Lev 23:7-8 On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not work at your occupations. For seven days you shall present the LORD'S offerings by fire; on the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation: you shall not work at your occupations.

Lev 23:21 On that same day you shall make proclamation; you shall hold a holy convocation; you shall not work at your occupations. This is a statute forever in all your settlements throughout your generations.

Lev 23:23 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the people of Israel, saying: In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a day of complete rest, a holy convocation commemorated with trumpet blasts.

Lev 23:27 Now, the tenth day of this seventh month is the day of atonement; it shall be a holy convocation for you: you shall deny yourselves and present the LORD'S offering by fire;

Lev 23:35-36 The first day shall be a holy convocation; you shall not work at your occupations. Seven days you shall present the LORD'S offerings by fire; on the eighth day you shall observe a holy convocation and present the LORD'S offerings by fire; it is a solemn assembly; you shall not work at your occupations.

Lev 23:37 These are the appointed festivals of the LORD, which you shall celebrate as times of holy convocation, for presenting to the LORD offerings by fire—burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings, each on its proper day—

God also warns Christians against a "lukewarm" attitude of not attending Church in the end time – a problem we see today where some people profess to believe in God but only attend Church a few times a year if at all. Yes, some

Christians are truly “scattered” geographically, but with today’s technology there are telephone hookups and recorded sermons that can be listened to in a variety of ways.

Heb 10:25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

One of the simple commands of God is that when we are sick, to call for the elders of the Church and be anointed. If there is no congregation with a ministry, how does one fulfill this scripture?

James 5:14 Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord.

When problems arise between two Christians, what is the Biblical solution? This is a three step process, the timing of each step should be exercised with wisdom. First, you talk with the individual privately. Second, you take two or three witnesses. If there is still no resolution, the third step is to take it to the church. The word for church is the usual Greek “ekklesia”. If the church is only made up of scattered individuals not knowing who all belongs to the Body of Christ, then how could any one ever hope to fulfill the instructions of Christ given in this scripture for solving human differences? The answer must be that the people called of God to be True Christians are a part of a congregation or assembly of people that make up the Church of God. True Christians will always be able to find and be a part of the Church of God and take any problems before its members. Paul was inspired to instruct the Corinthians to do this and admonished them for taking their problems between Christians to worldly courts in 1 Corinthians 6:1-6.

Matt 18:15-17 If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

How does one tithe if there is no Church with a ministry? God commands that the tithes be brought to His storehouse – His temple in the Old Testament, His Church in the New Testament. God states only the priest and Levites were to receive His tithes from the people in the Old Testament, and that that right has been transferred to the New Testament ministry. One cannot tithe to God by keeping their tithes in a personal bank account. In order to tithe to God, one must search for and find His True Church with an obedient ministry.

Mal 3:10 Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.

Heb 7:5, 12 And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to collect tithes from the people, that is, from their kindred, though these also are descended from Abraham. ... For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well.

WHAT SHOULD THE NAME OF THE CHURCH BE?

As profoundly shown in the following scriptures, the only name ever used to refer to God’s Church in the New Testament is always the Church of God, and then as necessary the city where a local church was located.

Acts 20:28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

1 Cor 1:2 Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:

1 Cor 10:32 Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God:

1 Cor 11:16 But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.

1 Cor 11:22 What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not.

1 Cor 15:9 For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

2 Cor 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia:

Gal 1: 13 For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it:

1 Thes 2:14 For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews:

2 Thes 1:4 So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure:

1 Tim 3:5 (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)

CONCLUSION

To summarize the important of God's Church in a few words is impossible. A few statements to review some of the more important concepts is all an article like this can offer. The scriptures state that the Church is the Body of Christ. That one concept in and of itself conveys the utmost importance of the Church. God has always chosen a people to work through in dealing with all human kind. He chose the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the peoples of Israel. If Israel had obeyed God, God would have used them to bring His laws, judgments and statutes, along with the peace and happiness they bring to human life, to the non Israelite peoples of the world. Israel disobeyed and forsook God. God the Father sent His Son to reveal the Father to mankind, set an example of obeying the laws of His Father, and to die for the sins of who have ever lived. The followers of Jesus started the New Testament Church after the death and resurrection of Jesus, to continue the existence of "His Body". The New Testament Church now has the responsibility to be an example to the world, to make disciples of those whom God will call to His truth. This is being accomplished in a small way now, the firstfruits, as the Bible refers to those called in this age of the world. In the now too distant future, Jesus Christ will return for the second time and His Body, His Church will grow from the size of the proverbial mustard seed to a giant tree that will fill the earth. Every example in the New Testament is of God working with human kind through His Church and the ministers of His Church. The Book of Revelation is specifically written to the Churches of God. Salvation, grace, mercy and forgiveness come from God, not the Church. But it is the Church of God that preaches and explains this to human kind. To reject the Church of God is to reject the Body of Christ – one extreme. To put our spiritual trust in a church organization is to go to the opposite extreme – our spiritual trust should only be in God. The balance is to accept, associate with, be nourished by, support and learn from the Church of God as one "proves all things" in their personal relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ our Savior.