**THE CHURCH OF THE NEW TESTAMENT**

**WHO ARE THEY**

**JOHN 8: 31-32**

Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “ If you abide in My words, then you are truly disciples of Mine,

And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.”

**JOHN 18 : 37 – 38**

 Pilate therefore said to Him,” So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “ You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.”

Pilate said to Him,” What is truth?”

The perception today is that ALL religious beliefs and doctrines are part and parcel of God’s “church’ but unfortunately, due to man’s intervention and interpretations the question can thus be asked, “ What is the truth?”

***THIS IS THE BIG QUESTION: WHAT IS THE TRUTH?***

*SHOULD JESUS, IN THE FLESH, COME TO EARTH TODAY****,***

To which church would He belong? Or should I ask, with which group of people would He want to identify? Would He say, “ This Sunday I am going to be a Methodist christian and next Sunday I am going to be a Baptist christian. The next Sunday I am going to be a NG or a Patria or perhaps I’ll decide to be an Eden or a Catholic Christian. Every week I can be friends with a particular group while the other groups will hate Me but then I can happily inter-change between the different groups so that every group can have a turn with Me. Unfortunately, there are so many different groups with all of their different beliefs that it is going to take Me some time to work through all of them!!”

*Gosh, as absurd and childish as it may seem, this is the reality of religion today and I am positive that this does not meet with God’s approval. Just imagine how divided God’s Spirit must be on a Sunday when all of these different “churches” get together to worship Him with all of their different beliefs and doctrines. Is it possible that God’s Spirit can be so divided ??!! Is God really confused? Is it possible for them to say that they LOVE the Lord with all of their heart, mind and soul but are not prepared to look at what their “church” really stands for? If God should stop all services on a Sunday and ask all at the same time why they are not worshipping together in unity and quotes them scripture that He directed regarding unity and why do they have these strange names given to His church, what would their answer be? Oh how silly and embarrassing their answers will sound to all.*

*Surely when Jesus gave instructions to His disciples in Matthew 28:19-20 and in Mark 16: 15-16 to go into the world and make disciples of all nations and teach them to OBSERVE God’s commandments, He never gave them instructions to allow the people to start their OWN “churches” with their OWN faiths and doctrines !! SURELY NOT ! So why is it then acceptable today? I am sure God is crying and satan is laughing at the religious world today and here is the worst of it – We and only we, are responsible for all of this because we took lightly the warning of God when He said beware, satan is prowling around like a hungry lion waiting to devour. “Surely God does not mean “me”. God knows I love Him and surely He won’t allow satan to devour me - even if I am not following the truth!!!”*

Should anyone be objective enough in looking at this scenario, it is quite clear that God’s Word has been turned into a “free for all” mockery.

Suppose that we had a special evangelistic meeting between 4 churches: Methodist; Baptist; Patria and Eden and 400 people want to dedicate their hearts to Jesus. A call is now made to these 400 to join a denomination/church of their choice. Should they join the Patria church, the other churches would object and say, no you can’t because we don’t agree with their doctrine. You must come and join our( my ) church and so it will go on and on and on. Maybe everyone will feel better if each one received 100.

Suppose there was a 5th church at this meeting and they proclaimed that the person wanting to follow Christ need only be a **Christian** as the people according to the New Testament in **Acts 11:26** were called **Christians** and *nothing more*. This group also proclaim that they have named their church according to the name the Apostles used in **Rom:** **16:16** ie, the church of Christ. They also proclaim that their doctrine is one that calls for **unity among all Christians** as **Jesus** prayed for and also as the **Apostle Paul** pleaded for –

**John 17: 20-21 ; 1 Corinth: 1:10-13 ; Eph: 4:3-6.**

This group also proclaim that they use **no man-made rules** for those who want to give their hearts over to Jesus Christ except *those laid down by Christ and executed by His apostles, ie.*

Jesus : Matt: 28:19-20 ; Mark : 16:16

*Apostles : Acts 2:37-47 ; Acts 16:29-33*

*This is our plea. Why divide into man-made organizations, wearing human names, teaching doctrines handed down by traditions or* *resolved at some conference or synod of men?* *Why not be simply a Christian and help to turn the tide of division and bring the world back to unity in Christ and His blood purchased church.*

This decision CAN be taken if the reader of this message is genuinely objective and is not afraid to do away with man-made doctrines and traditions and also not afraid to move away from “ majority must be ok” attitude but will again look at the statement that Jesus made in John 8: 32.

AND YOU SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH AND THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE!!!

***WHAT DO YOU STAND TO LOSE ? MAYBE ONLY YOUR SOUL!***

***WHAT DO YOU STAND TO GAIN? GOD’S APPROVAL AND YOUR SOUL!***

*I would like to tell you about the New Testament church.*

**Matthew 16: 13-19**

Verse : 13

And Jesus asks His disciples, “ Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

Verse : 14

They answer, “ Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah and still some others say, Jeremiah or one of the Prophets.”

Verse : 15

Jesus asks them, “ And who do you say I am?”

Verse : 16

And Simon Peter answered and said to Him,” Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Verses : 17-18

Christ makes this statement:” --- and upon this rock I will build my Church ( ie, the statement that Peter made ) and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”

“ MY CHURCH” as Jesus mentioned here above was started on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem ; Acts 2:1

**Luke 24: 47-49**

Verse 47

Jesus said to them,” ---and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”

Verse 48

“ You are witnesses of these things”

Verse 49

“ And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you, but you are to stay in the city ( Jerusalem )until you are clothed with power from on high.”

**ACTS**

**Acts : 1:12**

Then they ( disciples ) returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey away.

**Acts 2: 13**

And when they had entered they went up to the upper room where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James.

**Acts 2: 1-36**

The pouring out of the Holy Spirit takes place and from verse 14 we find the Apostle Peter taking his stand with the 11, explains to the Jews that the person whom they had crucified, **was in fact**, the Son of God.

Verse 37

Now when they heard this, they were pieced to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the Apostles, “ Brethren, what shall we do?”

Verse 38 **NB NB**

And Peter said to them, “ Repent and let each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins , and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Verse 41

So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about 3000 souls.

Verse 47 **NB NB**

---and the **Lord** was adding to their number ( Church ) day by day those who were being saved.

THIS “*NUMBER*” IS THE CHURCH THAT I WOULD LIKE TO SHARE WITH YOU. IT IS THE FIRST TIME AFTER JESUS’ DEATH THAT, AS WE SEE IN THE BOOK OF ACTS, THE BIBLE MENTIONS A GROUP OF PEOPLE THAT WERE ADDED TO THE CHURCH THAT JESUS SAID HE WAS GOING TO ESTABLISH (MATTHEW 16:18 ), WHERE GOD, JESUS AND HIS APOSTLES WERE UNITED.

**REMEMBER**

**MATTHEW 16:18**

JESUS SAID,” Upon this rock I will build “MY” Church”

**Romans 16:16**

Greet one another with a holy kiss. *All the churches of Christ greet you.*

*This statement “churches of Christ” could not have been referring to all the different “churches” we have today as THEY DID NOT EXIST!!!! It could ONLY have been referring to the one and only church that existed in that time and that could only have been “ THE CHURCH OF CHRIST” because that was what Jesus said He was going to do do !! The word “churches” also obviously refers to the different congregations of the church of Christ that sent their greetings.*

*I NOW WOULD LIKE TO INTRODUCE YOU TO THE CHURCH OF CHRIST AS NAMED BY THE APOSTLE PAUL which surely must have carried God’s stamp of approval.*

**THE CHURCH OF CHRIST**

**JESUS CHRIST IS:**

THE FOUNDER : Matthew 16:18

THE LAWGIVER Acts 2:36

THE HEAD Ephesians 5:23

THE SAVIOUR Ephesians 5:23

**ORIGIN**

Matt: 16:18 The gates of hades shall not prevail against it

Mark 9:1 While the Apostles were still living

Acts 1:8 and 2:1-4 When the Holy Spirit and power came from high

Luke 24:49 When the word of the Lord went forth from Jerusalem

**ORGANIZATION**

ELDERS : Spiritual leaders of the church

DEACONS : Serving the church

PREACHER : Presents spiritual lessons to the congregation

AUTONOMOUS : Self - governing under Christ. The congregation

 does not answer to any synod or committee.

REASON : That is how the church was governed in the NT.

 We follow the same example.

**THE WORSHIP SERVICE**

Communion : Acts 20:7 ( 1st day of every week ); 1 Corith: 10:16

1 Corith: 11: 20-30

Singing : Eph: 5:18 -19 and Col: 3:16

Praying : Acts 2:42 and 1 Thess: 5:17; 25

Giving : 1 Corith: 16: 1-2 and 2 Corith: 9:7

**DOCTRINE - NEW TESTAMENT**

Christ is the Law-giver : Eph; 4:7-16 and 5:24

The apostles teaching is it’s manual : Acts 2:42 and Eph: 2:20

The Holy Spirit is the Revealer : 1 Corith : 2:13

Only the Word is used as law – no man-made( synods or committees) rules.

**UNITY - NON-DENOMINATIONAL**

The Saviour prayed for it : John 17: 20-21

The Apostles prayed for it : 1 Corith : 1:10

The Apostles presented the plan for it : Eph : 4:4-6

ONE body – unity in organization

ONE spirit – unity in life

ONE hope – unity in trust

ONE Lord – unity in authority

ONE faith – unity in message

ONE baptism – unity in practise ( Believe and understand )

ONE God - unity in worship

**NB NB : AND NOW FOR THE “WHAT IF” OR “WHAT THEN” QUESTIONS**

As they say in English, “ What is in a name?”

If the **name** of the “church” is not important to Christ, so be it. Should the name however be important to Christ, what then? We in the church of Christ are not prepared to take that chance. We use the name used by the Apostles : The church of Christ : **Romans 16:16**

If your church was not established by **Jesus and His Apostles** on the day of Pentecost and God has no problem with, then so be it. Should God however **have a problem** with a “church” that was **not** established on the day of Pentecost but established by **men**, what then?

God said that there shall be **ONE** baptism ( Eph : 4:5 ). If infant baptism is acceptable to God then so be it. If God decides that only immersion is acceptable, *what then*? According to history, infant baptism only came into existence *150 years after Pentecost*. Surely that means that for 150 years it was the *accepted practise*. Infant baptism was brought in by the Catholic movement. *Why only then*?

We in the Church believe that the one wanting to be baptized needs to receive:

Instruction

Understand

Believe

Repent

Confess

Immersion

We follow the example of the New Testament church.

Should it be acceptable to God in allowing synods and committees to also decide what is and what is not important concerning His Word, then so be it. Should He however **have a problem** with “others” deciding on what is and what is not important as far as His Word is concerned, what then? We in the Church follow the example of the New Testament. Every congregation is **autonomous** unto itself. No synods or committees have any say over any congregation of the church of Christ.

The New Testament church follows the example of partaking of the “ the Lord’s Table” on every **1st day of the week** ( Acts 20:7 ). When God told the Jews to keep the Sabbath Holy in the Old Testament, He obviously meant every 7th day. Today there are “ churches” that have communion on a **monthly, quarterly, yearly** or even on a “**when they feel like it**” basis. Should this practise be acceptable with God, then so be it. Should God however have a problem with this inconsistency to His word, what then?

**NB NB**

The church of Christ only uses the Bible as it’s doctrinal guideline and will certainly never make use of any man-made laws and traditions.

*Therefore everyone can be just a Christian and not a Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Patria, Eden, etc, “Christian” that would force them to follow man-made rules and laws.*

THEREFORE I ASK AGAIN:

1) Why would Jesus make that statement in John 8:32 ,

“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” ,

*if it did not matter what we believed and then also if it did not matter to which church we belong.*

2) Why did Jesus pray for unity for His people : John 17:20-21. Of which unity was He praying for? If it be unity in ONE belief or faith, we are sitting with a huge problem as this certainly is not the case today and we will have to be ready with some good answers when we stand before God one day!!

What can we gain by stubbornly holding on to man-made laws and traditions or even worse, a “*It doesn’t worry me too much*” attitude? Maybe, just maybe we can lose our soul with an attitude like this!!

Remember: Jesus said in John 14:15, “ If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”

MY QUESTION TO YOU IS THUS: How much do you really love God? *Enough to change?* Paul and many others did!! *Remember also that the Apostle Paul was 100% genuine and sincere in his love for God but this did not protect him from Jesus revealing the TRUTH to him. We see thus that although we sometimes believe in something with all sincerity, sincerity in itself does not give us the power and the right to believe just as we please. If it is not in accordance with God’s truth, it means absolutely nothing.*

*Unfortunately we like to have our ears tickled and will wait for someone to come along that will tell us what we want to know and once that happens, we are happy because it suits us. And that someone is always waiting in the wind and God warns us of him. He goes by the name of satan and he tells this famous lie to all: “Do not worry about detail. It is not going to make any difference in the end because God knows you love Him. Surely God will understand if you don’t do everything by the book – as long as you love Him, that’s the important thing – not detail.” REALLY ??!!*

*The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy and says to him in 2 Timothy 4:1-4 (this is so important )*

*Verse 1 : I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead and by His appearing and His Kingdom*

*Verse 2: preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with great patience and instruction*

*Verse 3: For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires;*

*Verse 4: and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.*

SHOULD ANYONE READ THESE VERSES WITH ABSOLUTE INTEGRITY AND OBJECTIVENESS, ONE CAN ONLY FEEL A SENSE OF, “ *MAYBE I SHOULD HAVE ANOTHER LOOK AT WHAT I BELIEVE FOR MAYBE, JUST MAYBE, I HAVE HAD MY EARS TICKLED – PERHAPS EVEN UNKNOWINGLY.” THIS COULD COST ME MY SOUL!!*

**THE FINAL QUESTION IS THIS:**

HOW MUCH DO I REALLY LOVE THE LORD MY GOD?

***Is it enough to make me look at my faith again and ask;***

*Is it possible* that I am not following the absolute truth but following *man-made rules*? Why would I allow men ( although genuine ) to make decisions, concerning eternity, for me, *and not God*?????

Am I willing to earnestly enquire within myself regarding *what I actually believe?*

Could it be that I am in fact still only following *old man-made rules and traditions?*

Am I attending a church only because that is what my *forefathers* did or it’s where my *friends* are attending and it’s “*nice and comfortable*” there?

Have I ever taken the trouble to find out *why* the church, where I am at present worshipping, *does not carry the name of Christ*?

Have I ever questioned as to *who established the church where I am* *presently worshipping* and *when* it was established and *where* did they come from and *why* did they move or change?

Have I ever taken the time to challenge or do some re-search regarding the doctrine of the church I am at present attending or do I take it for granted that the “minister” *should know the truth*?

Have I ever questioned the reason why there are so many “churches’ if ***ALL*** the ministers know the truth as surely God would expect them to? Did God honestly give His Spirit different instructions regarding the establishment of His Church? If not, *WHAT THEN*?

*Is there a genuine possibility that God does not agree with the present state of affairs and if not, WHAT THEN??*

Will you also be one of the many who will say,” Oh, I don’t think it matters to which church one belongs. Everybody loves God and surely that is the most important thing. We should not delve to deep and critically into the written word because as long as we love God, that is all that matters.” And satan laughs! - (remember his instructions to his devils angels)

*IS THERE A “CHURCH” WITH WHOM YOU* ***DON’T AGREE******WITH AT ALL*** *REGARDING THEIR DOCTRINE? WHY WOULD YOU NOT JOIN THEM? THEY ALSO LOVE THE LORD DON’T THEY???*

**DID YOU KNOW:**

Since the day of Pentecost ( all scribes agree on this point ) until approximately 250 years after the death of Christ, there was only one “church” in the bible. After this period of time, a group of people ( later called the Catholic church ) came together and decided among themselves what is and what is not important regarding God’s word and *they* then also took decisions as to how *they* would go about preaching God’s word!!

Only later, approximately 1500 AD, with the restoration movement, did people decide to get back to the original Church’s doctrines, ie Martin Luther, John Wesley, John Calvin,etc.

*The church that Christ established NEVER EVER vanished but continued in small groups in Christian’s homes*. REMEMBER: JESUS SAID IN MATTHEW 16:18

“--- and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it.”

***DO YOU BELIEVE THAT STATEMENT??***

*THE CHOICE YOU NEED TO MAKE TODAY IS:*

*That it* ***is possible*** *( according to God’s word ) that there is supposed to be only one Church with one faith and one doctrine and if that be so, then what am I going to do about my present situation?*

*Or*

*Maybe God made a “****slight miscalculation****” and it would be unrealistic to expect this in today’s life. Maybe God did not look far enough into the future but anyway, I don’t think that it will make much difference that there are so many churches with all of their different doctrines and beliefs and so I am prepared to take that chance.*

May the Lord be with you in making this decision. May you have the *courage to break away from man-made rules, laws* *and traditions* and become part of the church which *Christ died and suffered for*. It will be a decision that will be in accordance with God’s word but definitely not in accordance with “man”. Should we have found ourselves in the years 0-250 after Christ’s death, before the Catholic movement brought in their man-made doctrine and rules, the decision would be *so much easier* as there was only *ONE* church at the time – ROMANS 16:16. – but then satan stepped in boldly and spread his famous lie. “It does not matter to which church you belong, as long as you love the Lord. Surely your Lord will understand”!! - IT”S SO SAD!! You see, the Lord does not HAVE to understand US. ***WE HAVE TO UNDERSTAND HIM!***

Do not worry about what your family or friends might say. Rather worry about what the Lord will say. When those piercing eyes of God look upon you one day, as they surely will, how will you look back at Him? ***With absolute joy*** or with absolute horror and regret - it’s too late!! But the toughest question for you now arises – what if, because of your casual disregard for God’s word, your family may be in trouble.

As it has been pointed out before:

2 very easy choices: MAN’S ( satan’s) way

 Or

 GOD’S way.

*ROMANS 12: 2*

*“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect”*

ACTS : 26 : 27 – 29 : KING AGRIPPA

During this discussion with king Agrippa, Paul almost succeeds in converting king Agrippa and then king Agrippa makes one of the **saddest statements in the bible**;

Verse 28 : ***And Agrippa replied to Paul,” In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian.”***

**BUT HE NEVER EVER BECAME A CHRISTIAN – *ALMOST THE TRUTH, BUT LOST*!!!**

*COULD THIS BE THE SITUATION WITH YOU TODAY – ALMOST THE TRUTH, BUT LOST??*

I pray with all the breath within me that you, the reader, will look upon this article as a “wake – up call”. A call to go back, however strange or awkward it may seem initially, to the church that Jesus pleaded and died for!! The church which bears His name, the church of Christ. (Matthew 16:18)

If I can be of any help regarding the church of the New Testament, please feel free to contact me.

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