

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 means "a calling out - a meeting or an assembly." In the Old Testament the English word church is not found. In the Old Testament the word for church is "convocation." The Hebrew word from which it is translated is "miqra" and it means "called out - as a public meeting," the same as 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 the sabbath of rest, an holy convocation; ye shall do no work therein: 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, an assembly, or church gathering, on the seventh-day Sabbath. It is God's plan for His people to assemble together to worship on the Sabbath. This is not to be neglected. Note what the Bible says in Hebrews chapter 10.

Hebrews 10:24,25 – *“And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembly of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”*

The Church is to be held in great respect for it is the object on which God bestows His supreme regard, calling it "His Bride." Believers become members of His body, the two become "one". Thus Christ has divested the Church with divine authority.

Matthew 18:18,19 *“Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”*

This does not mean that the Church can modify or change God's word. **Psalms 119:89** says, "*For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven.*"

What Jesus is saying in Matthew 18 is that the Church is to be in complete agreement with heaven's principles as taught in God's Word and that the church has the authority to administer God's Word within the organized body.

Today there is *the visible* and the *invisible* church. The *invisible* church is composed of all God's people throughout the world. The *visible* church is God's organized church, a group of people organized for service. The organization enables it to fulfill the great commission, "*Go ye into all the world preaching the gospel to every creature*" (Mark 15:16).

God leads His people from the invisible church into union with His visible church. It is only in the visible church that they can fully experience God's truth, 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 a 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 – "*Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.*"

Verses 25-27 - *“That there should be no schism (division) in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.”*

The gifts are also mentioned in **Romans 12:4 – 8** – *“For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.”*

These and other needed gifts are to be found *in* the Church. As members of the Church we should ask God to show us our specific gift and make an effort to find the ministry God has in store for us.

Even though many feel that organized religion is not needed, the fact is that without organization no institution or movement can prosper. And, it is also important what kind of organization the Church utilizes.

There are four forms of church government or organization:

- 1) Episcopal - Church government by bishops, 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.
- 3) Independent - Church government that makes the local church congregations supreme and final in its own domain.
- 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.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church 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.

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 on Mt. Sinai, so was tithing.

Genesis 14:18-20 – *“And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And **he gave him tithes of all.**”*

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 unto the LORD.*

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.

Verse 32 – *“And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passeth under the rod, **the tenth shall be holy unto the LORD.**”*

Note in Malachi how God refers to tithes and offerings –

Malachi 3:8 - *“Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? **In tithes and offerings.** Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and*

pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.”

There is the tithe which belongs to God, plus there is the opportunity to give offerings which we give from a heart of love as we are able and desire.

Deuteronomy 16:17 - *“Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD thy God which he hath given thee.”*

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

Matthew 23:23 - *“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other (tithing) undone.”*

The tithe is to be used to support the ministry of the church. This principle was established in the Old Testament.

Numbers 18:21 – *“And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation.”*

The Apostle Paul confirms this in the New Testament.

I Corinthians 9:13,14 – *“Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.”*

The Bible says God loves a cheerful giver. We should give cheerfully as Christians because we know the words of **I Chronicles 29:14** are true –

“All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.”

All things come from God; we are only stewards of His property and goods.

Being part of God's Church and claiming to be Christians, Christ-like, the way we act, talk, and dress is very important.

II Corinthians 5:18,20 – *“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.”*

As Christians, we are ambassadors or representatives of Christ in this world. Let's examine 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, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.”*

Philippians 4:8 - *“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”*

This applies to the music we listen to, the books we read, and the TV and movies we watch. Music has a great power of influence and the Christian should avoid music with suggestive lyrics or melodies that bring thoughts of sex, drinking, drugs, or violence.

Movies and TV have a greater impact on the mind and life of an individual than does any other single activity in America.

The clear biblical principal is found in **Psalms 101:1-4** – *“I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when wilt thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me. A froward heart shall depart from me: I will not esteem a wicked person.”*

David says that he will do what is right even when he is at home and no one would know. 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” a wicked person. The word know in the Hebrew is “to esteem” or “idolize” a wicked person as some do the movie stars and sports heroes today. True Christians will not “idolize” any man but *“the man Jesus Christ”!*

The sincere 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, the way we dress will reflect on Christ’s good name; therefore as Christians we will dress moderately and modestly. Not as a legalistic requirement, but realizing we are His representatives in this world. The Bible gives us guidance on dress.

I Peter 3:3 – *“Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.”*

I Timothy 2:9,10 – *“In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.”*

Christians 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”* (expensive worldly fashion). Christians influence unbelievers, not by looking and acting like the world – but instead 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 material goods, and neglecting the church and the poor, what does that say about where our heart is?

Jesus said - *“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”* (Matthew 6:19 – 21)

Maybe we could also say it this way – “Where your heart is, there your treasure will be also.”

The Church was organized to accomplish God’s plan to fill this planet with the knowledge of His glory, grace and love. Only the visible church can provide the number of functions vital to meeting this end. To accomplish this, the church needs all its members actively involved.

Response Questions:

1. Is it clear to you that tithing is still relevant for the believer today?
Yes ___ No ___

2. Is it clear to you that offerings are to be given in addition to tithes from a heart of love? Yes ___ No ___

3. Do you believe that God gives everyone a gift of the Spirit so that they can 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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