

Should One Join the Church of His Choice?

According to the Constitution of the United States, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” Hence, **legally** speaking, a person can be a member of any church in existence, or he could choose to be a member of no church. He could be an atheist or a Christian, and yet be law-abiding.

But **scripturally** speaking, the answer must be different — different not because we desire it to be different, but because God made it that way! What God has bound, we cannot loose, what God has loosed, we are not at liberty to bind. It behooves us, therefore, to forget our prejudices and see what the Bible (the word of God) teaches.

The expression “join the church **of your choice**” is uttered so frequently that one would think such a statement must appear many times in the Bible. But, strangely enough, this expression is not recorded a **single** time in all the Bible! Don’t take my word for it — read your Bible for yourself. Furthermore, the expression “**join the church**” is not recorded therein. We do read of people obeying the gospel and, upon their obedience, of God adding them to His church, Acts 2:38-47. But never do we read of non-Christians “joining the church.”

“*God is not the author of confusion...*,” I Cor. 14:33. But God would be the author of much confusion if He had authorized people to join the various churches of their respective choice. Why would I dare to make such a statement as the one just made? Simply because, other than to obey or disobey (Josh. 24:15), God did not give people a choice in religion. Jesus Christ built one church (Matt. 16:18), which is His body (Eph. 1:22-23). The church Jesus built is His bride (Eph. 5:23-25), and being His bride, it wears His name (Romans 16:16), and it must function according to His will (Col. 3:17). Hence, if God had taught people to join the church of their choice, He would have been implying that there is more than one church, even though the Bible plainly declares that the church is Christ’s body, and that there is “*one body*,” Eph. 1:22-23; Eph. 4:4). Regarding this point, we note I Cor. 12:20, wherein the apostle Paul wrote, saying, “*But now indeed there are many members, yet one body*” (NKJV). The KJV renders it “*but one body!*” Furthermore, if God had authorized various people to join the respective churches (Denominations) of their choice, He would have been encouraging religious division— while **condemning** religious division in other passages! Cf. John 17:20-21; I Cor. 1:10-13; Eph. 4:1-6, etc.

Why be a member of the church of your choice? Why not be a member of the church of **God’s** choice? Dear friend, our salvation does not depend upon what **we** think or what we desire. It depends upon our learning, and doing, what **God** desires, and what He has required of us. He is our Creator; we are the Created (Gen. 1:1,26-27). He is the “*potter*,” we are the “*clay*” (Rom. 9:21). Let us therefore be members of the church of **God’s** choice, and serve in the vineyard of God’s choice, so that we might “spend eternity” with God. After all, He has chosen to save those who choose to obey and follow His chosen plan. Friend, who did the choosing in **your** case? —B.

“Is Christ Divided?”

Bible students will recall the above statement as being one asked by the apostle Paul in his letter to “the *church of God...at Corinth.*” After admonishing the members thereof to “*speak the same thing*” so that there “*be no divisions among*” them, and that they be “*perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment,*” he then wrote, saying, “*for it has been declared unto me of you, my brethren...that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?*” (I Cor. 1:10-13).

Contention was present. Various church organizations (Denominations) were non-existent at that time, but parties had formed within the church at Corinth. Some claimed to be “*of Paul,*” some “*of Apollos,*” others “*of Cephas,*” and others “*of Christ.*” Different and differing religious parties within the church were as unscriptural and as strife-producing then as different and differing religious Denominations are now.

Paul asked “*Is Christ divided.*” Is it proper for Christ’s body, the church (Eph., 1:22-23; 4:4) to be cut into various parts and those parts be assigned to various human leaders? In these few verses, the apostle let it be known that one could not religiously be “*of Paul,*” unless: (1) Christ was “*divided,*” (2) Paul was “*crucified*” for them, and (3) he was “*baptized in the name of Paul.*” These questions were designed to put to naught the division then present and to encourage all who had been baptized in the name of Christ to wear His name and to submit themselves completely to Him, while refusing to wear human names, or follow human leaders in spiritual affairs.

But Paul’s injunction is largely unheeded today! The religious world seeks to divide Christ. Some are Of John (the Baptizer), others are Of Martin Luther, or John Wesley, or Joseph Smith or John Calvin or “*of*” other men, equally as fallible and uninspired, but who founded different religious Denominations.

Furthermore, the religious world refuses to “*speak the same thing*” (I Cor. 1:10), and is now parroting human tradition, the “*voice of the church,*” the “*voice of the pope,*” and the various man-made creeds, manuals, disciplines, etc., which are considered law for the many man-made churches.

Members of the church of Christ (the church you can read in the Bible) have been baptized “*in the name of Jesus Christ*” (Acts 2:38), and (if they are faithful) they submit to no authority other than God’s word, and they wear Christ’s name, even as did the disciples at Antioch, who were “*called Christians*” (Acts 11:26)

Kind reader, why “*divide Christ*” when we could (if we would) unite upon the **Lord’s** plan? Of course, this necessitates the discarding and casting off of all man-made

laws and accepting only a “*thus saith the Lord*” for what we believe and practice religiously. But think of the wonderful benefits this would provide — both in the now, and in **the hereafter!**

You should be pleased to know that there is a church in your neighborhood, which wears the name of Christ, follows only His law in spiritual affairs, and rejects every doctrine which is not of God. Come, visit us, investigate what we teach, and see for yourself. If you desire private, informal, studies in which you can make comments, ask Bible questions, and mutually investigate its teachings, this can be arranged.

*** —B. Witherington

When Does a Farmer Cease to be a Farmer?

Let’s say that farmer Jones attends all the farmers’ co-op meetings. That he even brings visitors with him occasionally. And that he pays his co-op dues regularly. But let’s also say that farmer Jones stops plowing his soil, stops planting seed, stops all cultivation, and stops harvesting. When he fails to do these, he stops being a farmer because he has stopped doing the things that identify him as a farmer.

Let’s apply this same line of thinking to a Christian. Let’s say that he continues to attend all the church services. That he is faithful to bring others with him and that he pays his “dues.” But let’s say that this church member stops praying at home, stops doing personal work, stops visiting the sick and shut-ins, stops living a faithful Christian life before others, then as surely as the farmer ceased to be a farmer when he quit farming, the child of God ceases to be a Christian when he ceases to perform the work of a Christian.

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