



“The Church of Christ’s Choice”

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Democracy has spread across the globe over the past century until now, more than half of nations of the world allow their citizens to choose their leaders. We like a sense of self-determination. We like to be in control and have choices. In America, we live in a free market economy and that means that economically, we have a seemingly endless number of choices when it comes to the things we buy. We truly live in a world of decisions and choices. Consequently, businesses and corporations must account for that by competing for our attention and convincing us that their product is better in quality or value than someone else’s. If we don’t like a particular product, we can simply go elsewhere or search until we find the thing that suits our needs or desires.

Is that not the approach we have taken to the church as well? Since the falling away—but especially since the beginning of the Protestant Reformation—religious bodies of one kind or another have proliferated until there are nearly more than we can count. For those who become interested in Christianity and who seek to identify with a church, a daunting task confronts them. Which one? And on what basis? Why? If we’re honest with ourselves, doesn’t it most often boil down to which church attracts us? To which church is closest to our way of thinking or is convenient to us and that offers the most things that appeal to us? Perhaps it’s a matter of social interaction or a preference of style. But how often today does someone take a Bible in hand and actually search for the church contained therein? You see, faith and conviction have been replaced in our culture by a spirit of consumerism. Consequently, churches work very hard to present themselves as the most appealing, the most exciting and popular, the most accommodating, the most culturally relevant...and on and on the list goes. Hardly a week goes by that I don’t see an internet advertisement from some religious consulting firm offering to sell their services to any church wanting to boost attendance, get noticed in the community, and position themselves as the most appealing to the most people.

Well, that’s not altogether a new thing. For years, famous televangelists have urged their converts at crusades and over television and radio to go find and join “a church of your choice.” Have you heard

them say that? Have you heard them say, “Attend the church of your choice next Sunday”? Or have you ever heard them say, “Now, go find and become part of the church of Christ’s choice”? I don’t recall hearing that, but that’s what I want us to think about today. Jesus said, “...upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). Won’t you open up your Bible and study with me today about the church that Jesus built? In the age of choice, does Jesus have a choice in the matter?

It has been so often repeated that it’s become cliché in the evangelical world: “Attend (or join) the church of your choice.” That has a nice ring to it because we generally like to be given choices when it comes to the things we buy or do. Stores compete for business so why shouldn’t churches do the same? Consequently, when people show interest in religious things, they survey the fragmented church community and they are faced with choosing one that most appeals to them. Churches understand this, so they reach out, hoping to win the attendance and membership of the seeker.

Some people choose a church because their family or friends are members of it. Some because the church aligns with their religious heritage or tradition. Some because of the preacher, musical offerings, ministry offerings, or social standings and so forth. If they attend and something isn’t to their liking, or if another church comes along offering more or appealing to them more, they will choose that church for the time being. Does it occur to us that the one who should have the choice in the matter is not us, but Christ? We’re told to “attend the church of our choice” as though Christ doesn’t have a church OR a choice in the matter. But, to be blunt, Christ is the ONLY ONE who should have a choice in this matter. You see, as the masses search for the church of their choice, the one who is interested in truth and doing the will of God will take the Bible in hand and seek the one of His choosing. That’s because the church that Jesus founded is clearly revealed in the word of God along with identifying characteristics. So, what is the church of Christ’s choice?

Firstly, the church of Christ’s choice is the one that He alone built. The Savior said, “...on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” Notice that Jesus said, “I will build My church...” Jesus would build the church—not some other man or group of men, but Him. And He would build His church—not churches. Some protest that that’s far too narrow and exclusive, especially in this day of ecumenicalism and a mind-boggling number and myriad of religious organizations and denominations. But Jesus plainly said, “I will build My church.” I challenge anyone to find a passage of scripture where Jesus promised to build any more than one. Paul would later say:

Ephesians 4:3-6 “Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in 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 you all.”

It’s perfectly clear what Paul meant when he said there is “one God and Father of all” or “one Lord” or “one Spirit.” Very few people would question what the apostle said or wonder about what he meant. So, shouldn’t it just as readily be accepted that there is “one body” and “one faith” since Paul said that as well? Not more than one. Certainly not many. Paul said **one**. He used the metaphor **body** to refer to the church of the Lord.

Colossians 1:18 “And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.”

Paul says that the *body of Christ* is the *church of Christ*; His body is His church. And Paul told the Ephesians that there is but **“one body.”** That is, there is but **one church.** He declares that there is but **“one faith.”** The word *faith* there refers to the *body of truth that the church follows in belief and practice.* Isn't that contrary to the idea that there are many churches representing many faiths? Someone might say, *You misunderstand. The one body/church is made up of ALL the many denominations, and they're all just different expressions of the same faith and, ultimately, the same church.* But is that true? Doesn't the word *denomination* imply a *sect or division of the whole?* Surely that's not what Jesus meant when He said, **“I will build My church.”** Surely He didn't envision a fragmented body splintered into varied and conflicting denominations representing contrary beliefs and practices. But that's exactly what we see around us today. I'm certain that's not what Jesus meant, for He later prayed in His great high priestly prayer:

John 17:20-21 **“I do not pray for these alone (that is, His twelve disciples), but also for those who will believe in Me through their word (that is, all who would hear, believe, and obey the gospel); that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.”**

The church that Jesus built is to be one, the same way that God the Father and Christ the Son are One. Do the Father and Son represent two different theologies? Two different approaches to worship? Two different ways of salvation? Of course not. They're ONE—in mission, in purpose, but even in mind.

I Corinthians 1:10 **“Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”**

I realize we are a long, long way from the ideal that the apostle expressed in this verse. The sad thing is that we're not even trying to achieve that ideal. We're contented and satisfied to be a religious world that is segregated and divided into hundreds and hundreds of varying and different churches that ultimately have as their beginning men and not the Lord Jesus. The church of Christ's choice is not only UN-denominational, but it is PRE-denominational. It existed long before the many denominations ever came to be, and it was never intended to be divided into denominations. Jesus Christ built His church on the first Day of Pentecost after His resurrection in the city of Jerusalem. That church grew to cover the earth as the gospel was preached to the nations. It was one church and no more.

Then again, someone may ask, *But isn't the body of Christ made up of “many members” according to Paul in I Corinthians 12?* Paul wasn't sanctioning denominationalism or suggesting it in the least. The *“many members”* are the individual people who make up each local congregation of ultimately the same body. You read about members of the church, congregations of the church (**Romans 16:16**), but you do not read of differing denominations or organizations in the word of God. They didn't exist for hundreds of years and they came into being not by the word of God, but by the will and ways of men. Jesus established His church and that church is undoubtedly the one of His choice—not one built by someone else at some later time. Therefore, we need to take the Bible in hand and be searching for the one that He built. Not merely comparing the ones that men have since built.

Secondly, the church of Christ's choice is the one He rules. Since Jesus was given the authority by God to build His church, He alone was given the authority to rule over that church, and that He does.

Ephesians 1:22-23 “And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

The phrase *under Christ's feet* means it was put *under His authority or rule*. He is the head of His body represented by the inspired apostles and their writings, according to **Ephesians 2:20**. If Jesus rules His church, doesn't that imply that the church follows Christ's teachings, His will, His directions, His examples, and His alone? Wouldn't that mean that the church acts and worships only by His authority and not that of men today? If that be the case, it means that the church of Christ's choice is ruled and governed by Christ Himself through His inspired word—not a convention, not some council of men convened, but rather through Christ and His word, the New Testament, as its only rule of faith. Therefore, the church of Christ's choice has no creed but the Bible itself. No teaching, practice, form of worship, or belief that is not authorized by the word of Jesus the King. The Bible is its pattern and guide in faith, work, and worship. When we're seeking out the church, it's not a matter of what we like or prefer. Rather, it's a matter of a church following the word of God alone and rejecting that for which there is no Bible authority or sanction.

Thirdly, the church of Christ's choice wears His name. Along with the phrase “church of your choice” is another popular catch phrase “there's nothing in a name.” Is that how Christ looked at His name in relation to the church?

Ephesians 3:14-15 “For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named...”

Names are profoundly important when it comes to our physical family. We acknowledge that. They identify us with those to whom we belong and with whom we are associated by blood. A name, for example, joins a husband and wife together and indicates the lineage of a father down to a son and so forth. Paul said the family of God is named of the Lord Jesus Christ. It wears His name. The church is the bride of Christ, not of Martin Luther or some other man.

Ephesians 5:30-32 “For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.”

II Corinthians 11:2 “For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.”

The church is Christ's creation; it is His body, His bride, His family, His kingdom. Why would it wear any other name? That's the question. Is there anything more divisive and factionalizing than to wear the name of some other person? You see, names are a way of identifying an organization with its founder or its head and who or what it represents. Names are important. In fact, religion is one of the only areas of life where we minimize and dismiss their importance.

I don't want to be identified with some pet doctrine or some action of the church that Jesus enjoined upon the church, as important and essential as that may be. I want to be identified with Christ and belonging to Him and no other. Jesus gave the church His name to wear and the church should be glad to wear it and it alone. It is a worthy name, an accurate name, and the church that wears it belongs to Him. Paul told the believers at Rome concerning the other congregations in the brotherhood, **“The churches of Christ salute you” (Romans 16:16)**. He wasn't attaching some denominational designation

to the church by referring to such a phrase. He was merely aptly describing the relationship of the church to Christ. He was describing what those churches were and to whom they belonged. That's what names are about. That's what we mean when we refer to the churches of Christ today. It is referred to as the church of God, referring to God the Son. Also, as the church of the Firstborn, again referring to Christ. Christ's church wears His name because it is His church, His bride, His family, and because it is His body.

Finally, the church of Christ's choice is the one that He adds people to when they are baptized for the remission of their sins. It is not one that people join by meeting a denominational body's requirements or bylaws. But Christ's church is the one that people are added to by Christ Himself when they obey the gospel. That's an incredibly important distinction and one that we very well need to be aware of. That's the plain teaching of **the book of Acts** and is one of the very first things pointed out to us about the church at the time of its establishment on the Day of Pentecost after the resurrection and ascension of Christ—the day Jesus built His church. That day, thousands of unbelieving Jews heard Peter preach the gospel of the risen and exalted Christ and they came to believe that He was indeed the Christ, the Savior, and they now wanted to submit unto Him as Lord. So, in the guilt of their sins, they cried out to Peter and the apostles.

Acts 2:37-38 "Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Now, that's your Bible, friend. Look at **verse 41**.

Acts 2:41 "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them."

Notice there was no delay. They were baptized *that day*.

Acts 2:47 "...praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved."

No mourner's benches, no prayer altars, no calls for people to stop where they are and bow their heads and invite Jesus into their hearts. They now believed that Jesus was the Christ, they were told to turn from their sins in repentance and be baptized by the authority of Christ for the remission of their sins, they were saved, and the Lord at that time added them to the church.

Is there anything there in the slightest way that indicates those people were told to go and join the church of their choice? No, the Lord added them to THE church. For one thing, there was no other church. And in the eyes of God, there still is no other church. The Lord added them to His church when they were baptized for the remission of their sins and were saved from their sins.

I Corinthians 12:13 "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body..."

The church is whose choice? Jesus built one. He is the head of it. It wears His precious name. It follows His word in faith and practice. It's made up of those who in faith, repent of their sins, confess their faith in Him, and are baptized by His authority for the remission of their sins. At which point—not before and

not one minute after—He adds them to that church. Friend, the church of Christ's choice. Not yours or mine. Are you a member of that church? Are you sure? Have you truly sought the church of His choice? Is it the one revealed in the New Testament because it does matter. Is the church you're a member of His choice or yours? Investigate the scriptures. Look at what they reveal about the church. Strive for a return to the church that Jesus built 2,000 years ago before the churches and denominations established by men ever came to be.

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