

Lesson No. 15

What Does the Bible Say About the Church and Churches?

1. What are the main events in the history of the early Christian Church?

THE BIBLE SAYS--

Acts to Revelation.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH HISTORY. (About 30 to 100 A.D.)

On Pentecost, the birthday of the Christian Church, the Holy Spirit converts three thousand souls through Peter's sermon at Jerusalem. The infant Church grows mightily, and when, after the martyrdom of Stephen, a persecution sets in and scatters the Christians throughout Judaea and Samaria, this but serves to extend the kingdom of Christ to these regions. Peter, who with the other apostles has remained at Jerusalem, now receives a vision by which God impresses on him that the Gospel is not intended only for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles.

Meanwhile the exalted Christ appears to Saul, the persecutor of Christians, converts him into a Paul and announces to him that he is to become His apostle to the Gentiles.

Another persecution breaks out in Jerusalem and the apostle James is killed. Peter, too, is imprisoned, but is miraculously delivered, and with other apostles carries on the work of the Lord among the Jews.

Paul with his helpers makes three extensive missionary journeys, preaching the Gospel in a large number of Gentile cities, and founding many congregations. Finally this greatest of the apostles is taken to Rome as a prisoner, but even there he declares the crucified and risen Christ until he seals his testimony with his blood. It seems that only one of the apostles died a natural death, John, who wrote the last book of the Bible about 95 A.D. (Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D.)

These faithful witnesses literally consumed themselves in the service of Christ and His Gospel. And with what result? *"I say,"* writes Paul, *"have they (the people of that time) not heard? Yes, indeed: Their sound has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world."* (Romans 10:18).

FROM THIS WE LEARN--

Having received power from the Holy Spirit, the apostles, according to the directions given them by Christ, witnessed unto Him *"in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and Samaria, and to the end of the earth"* (Acts 1:8).

2. What do the Scriptures teach of the Church of Jesus Christ ?

THE BIBLE SAYS--

- (a) **Romans 12:5.** We, being many, are **one body** in Christ.
- (b) **Acts 5:14.** **Believers** were increasingly added to the Lord.
- (b) **Romans 8:9.** Now if anyone **does not have the Spirit** of Christ, **he is not His.**
- (c) **Luke 17:20-21.** The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, See here! or See there! For indeed, the **kingdom of God is within you.**
- (c) **2 Timothy 2:19.** **The Lord knows** those who are His.
- (d) **Ephesians 5:25-27.** Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might **sanctify and cleanse her** with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a **glorious church**, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be **holy and without blemish.**
- (d) **1 Peter 2:5.** You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a **holy** priesthood, to offer up **spiritual sacrifices** acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.
- *(e) **1 Corinthians 3:11.** For no other **foundation** can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus

Christ.

- (f) **Matthew 16:18.** The gates of Hades shall **not prevail against it.**
- *(g) **John 14:6.** Jesus said to him, I am the way, the truth, and the life. **No one** comes to the Father **except through Me.**
- (h) **Isaiah 55:11.** So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it **shall not return to Me void**, but it shall **accomplish what I please**, and it shall **prosper** in the thing for which I sent it.

FROM THIS WE LEARN--

- (A) There is only one Church of Jesus Christ.
- (B) This Church is composed of all believers in Christ, and of believers only. (Communion of saints.)
- (C) This Church is invisible, since no one can look into another's heart and see whether he is a believer.
- (D) This Church is holy, because it consists of people who are made holy by faith in Christ and who serve God with holy works.
- (E) This Church bears the name Christian, because it is built upon Christ, its one and only Foundation.
- (F) This Church is imperishable, because the Holy Spirit at all times gathers and preserves a congregation of believers.
- (G) This Church is the only saving Church, for it is only by faith in Christ that man can enter heaven.
- (H) The Church of Jesus Christ is to be found wherever the Gospel of Christ is in use, for according to God's promise His Word shall not be preached in vain.

3. What do the Scriptures teach of visible Christian churches?

THE BIBLE SAYS--

- (a) **Matthew 18:20.** For where **two or three are gathered** together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.
- (a) **Revelation 3:13.** He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to **the churches.**
- (b) **Matthew 13:47,48.** Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of **every kind**, which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the **good into vessels**, but **threw the bad away.**

FROM THIS WE LEARN--

- (A) The Scriptures speak of groups of Christians gathering together, as well as churches, or congregations, being established in certain localities for the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments (synod is also to be regarded as church, cf. "*Concerning Church and Ministry*").
- (B) In such visible gatherings or churches there can be, besides true believers, also hypocrites who do not belong to the one invisible Church.

4. What do the Scriptures teach of true and erring visible Christian churches?

THE BIBLE SAYS--

- (a) **Matthew 28:20.** Teaching them to observe **all things** that I have commanded you.
- (b) **Matthew 15:9.** And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines **the commandments of men.**

FROM THIS WE LEARN--

- (A) A true visible congregation or larger church body is one which has, teaches, and confesses the entire doctrine of the Word of God and administers the Sacraments according to Christ's institution.
- (B) An erring visible congregation or larger church body is one which teaches false doctrine besides the main truths of the Gospel. (Where the doctrine of the Trinity, the deity of Christ and His atoning work are denied, there is no more Gospel, and hence no church at all.)

5. When do we use the doctrine of the Church properly?

THE BIBLE SAYS--

- *(a) **2 Corinthians 13:5.** Examine yourselves as to whether you **are in the faith.** Test yourselves.
- (b) **Matthew 10:32,33.** Therefore whoever **confesses Me before men**, him I will also confess before

My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.

- *(b) **John 8:31,32.** Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, If you **abide in My word**, you are **My disciples indeed**. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.
- (b) **Acts 2:42.** And they **continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine** and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.
- (b) **1 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**.
- (c) **2 Thessalonians 3:1.** Finally, brethren, **pray for us**, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you.
- (c) **Acts 8:4.** Therefore those who were scattered **went everywhere preaching the word**.
- (c) **Matthew 28:19.** Go therefore and **make disciples of all the nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
- (c) **1 Corinthians 9:14.** Even so the Lord has commanded that **those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel**.
- (c) **Galatians 6:6.** Let him who is taught the word **share in all good things with him who teaches**.
- *(d) **Matthew 7:15.** **Beware of false prophets**, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.
- *(d) **Romans 16:17.** Now I urge you, brethren, **note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine** which you learned, and **avoid them**.
- (d) **2 Corinthians 6:17.** Therefore **come out from among them and be separate**, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.

FROM THIS WE LEARN--

We use the doctrine of the Church properly

- (A) When we take heed to be and remain members of the invisible Church by sincere faith in our Redeemer;
- (B) When we join and faithfully adhere to the Church which teaches the Word of God in all its purity;
- (C) When we do all in our power to maintain, promote, and extend this Church by prayer, personal mission work, service, and financial support;
- (D) When we avoid all erring churches and all organizations that profess a false religion.

Before the Next Lesson

FILL OUT Work Sheet No. 15.

MEMORIZE the Bible passages marked with an asterisk (*)



READ Acts, chapters 5-11.

Work Sheet No. 15

1.

Name three erring Christian churches, mentioning in connection with each at least one false doctrine taught by the same.

- (A)
- (B)
- (C)

2.

(Check whether true or false.)

- (A) The Holy Christian Church consists of all who profess the Christian faith. True. False.
- (B) It makes no difference which Christian church one joins. True. False.

3.

Name some churches which deny the fundamental truths of Christianity and are therefore not Christian churches.....

4.

Religious unionism consists in joint worship of those not united in doctrine. Which Bible passage in Lesson 15 forbids unionism?

5.

(A) Most lodges are religious organizations, having chaplains, rituals, burial services, etc. The heart of lodge religion is salvation by character, or good works. Prove with a Bible passage from Lesson 15 that such lodge religion is anti-Christian and does not lead to heaven.

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(B) Most lodges accept people of all faiths, Jews, Christians, etc. In order not to offend those who are not Christians, the name of Christ is omitted in their rituals. Which Bible passage in Lesson 15 condemns this?

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(C) In most lodges people of various faiths worship together. What is such joint worship called?

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(D) Mention other reasons why a Christian may not join an anti-Christian lodge.....

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6.

Supporting the work of our Church with our contributions is our Christian duty and privilege.

(A) What did God demand of His people in Old Testament times? (See Leviticus 27:30-33.)

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(B) Which three things concerning our giving are emphasized in 1 Corinthians 16:2?

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(C) What does 2 Corinthians 5:14 teach concerning Christian giving?

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