

Should You JOIN a Church?

Many have asked, "Which church would you recommend?"
"Where can I fellowship?" "Should I go to church?" Here are
the BIBLE answers that will open your eyes!

by Garner Ted Armstrong

WHY all the furor about church attendance? Does it *really* make any difference whether you attend a church? Some say, "I've never been inside a church, and yet I know I'm as good a Christian as anyone else!"

Others, firmly convinced church-going is a vital part of Christianity, believe membership and attendance at church is necessary to salvation.

Are you a churchgoer? — SHOULD you be?

"Go to Church" Campaigns

Following the belief that it is vitally necessary to attend church in order to be a true Christian, many hold campaigns to increase church membership.

If any answer the altar call, or "come forward" at the climax of the appeal, they are counseled to JOIN A CHURCH. ANY church. It makes no difference WHICH, so long as that person is somehow convinced he should be attending a church.

To many, the "unchurched" represent a vast multitude of people who are as yet unsaved. Assuming they will *become* "saved" if they are convinced they should attend a church, every effort is made to increase church attendance.

You've seen the billboards, the ads in magazines, or perhaps in movie theaters, urging people to "attend the church of your choice," haven't you?

What is behind it?

What Is a Church?

Jesus promised, "I will build MY CHURCH" (Matt. 16:18). But what *is* a church? The word "church" comes from the Greek, *ecclesia*, which is derived from a root, meaning "to call out." The Church Jesus said He would BUILD is a group of "called-out ones." THIS Church is *the Body of Christ*,

made up of many different *members* (I Cor. 12:27).

But most people do not conceive of the Church as Jesus built it!

Today, we have become confused. Religion is in chaos. Today, instead of the ONE CHURCH, the one group of *called-out ones* who belong to Jesus Christ, we see literally HUNDREDS of *DIFFERING* groups, with different beliefs, different creeds and religious books to which they attribute Divine authority, different customs, different methods of church government, different goals, different places of worship, different doctrines — carloads and myriads of insurmountable differences!

WHY?

I know a man, who, as a young boy, was preparing to attend church. As he began to trudge down the country road toward the small church building some distance away, a neighbor friend stopped in his car, and offered the lad a ride. Grateful for the ride, and for being able to avoid the dirt of the road, the boy seated himself comfortably beside his neighbor.

Shortly, the car pulled to a stop in front of the small churchyard. The neighbor opened the door, and allowed the boy to get out. Struck with a sudden thought, the boy hesitated, and then finally got out of the car.

Still thoughtful, he entered the small church building — to hurry to the matronly woman who was the children's teacher. Briefly, he explained how his neighbor had delivered him to the church — and how the same kindly man had *continued down the road* some distance further — to enter his own, a *different*, church. "Why is it," asked the boy of his teacher, "that he doesn't just come in HERE to OUR church,

instead of going so much farther to another?"

The teacher *could not answer!*

Can you?

Is there ONE God? Then why do people try to worship Him in over a million different ways? Is there ONE Christ? Is there ONE Bible? Is there only ONE TRUE CHURCH? Yes, there is!

"There is ONE body, and ONE Spirit, even as ye are called in ONE hope of your calling; ONE LORD, ONE faith [body of beliefs — doctrine], ONE baptism, ONE God and Father of all" (Eph. 4:4-6).

Where IS God's Church?

Jesus Christ DID build His Church, just as He promised He would. What is more, He inspired His servants to write down specific, detailed, *identifying marks* of that ONE Church, so whoever really THIRSTED for the truth, and *wanted* to find His true Church, could recognize it when he found it!

But people do not know *where* to look. Nearly every great error in thinking stems from one *false assumption*. People *assume*. Because most *assume* many things about what the Church should be, they are led into a maze and a labyrinth of false claims, obscure history, and error. Let's not assume!

There is only one real *source* that you can absolutely trust. That source is your own Bible!

People *assume* many things about Christ. Why assume? Why not search His own words instead?

Jesus *identified* His Church! Let's ask Jesus HIMSELF what it is like — what it would be doing — where it is — HOW to get into it!

What Is the Church Like?

Jesus Christ said NO MAN could come unto Him, except it were given him of

the Father (John 6:44). When He explained He was the "Bread of Life," and began to reveal the deep spiritual significance of the WORD of God, of His approaching sacrifice, which is depicted by the Passover, many of the disciples found this truth *too strong* for them! They had *supposed* He was an "interesting" man — a good Teacher — that He had some "new ideas." But this was too much.

"From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked *no more* with him" (John 6:66). Jesus turned to Peter and all the twelve and asked, "Will ye also go away?" But Peter answered, "Lord, to WHOM shall we go? THOU HAST the words of eternal life!" (John 6:67-68.)

Where else can YOU go?

Only CHRIST HIMSELF has the TRUE words of eternal life! And Christ is ALIVE! HE is the LIVING HEAD of HIS TRUE CHURCH!

Let's notice a grossly misunderstood verse that explains this.

Jesus said, "And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter [Greek: *petros*, which is a *little stone*, or a *pebble*], and upon this ROCK [Greek: *PETRA*, or big ROCK] I will build my Church; and the gates of hell [the grave — death] shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18).

And HE DID BUILD IT!

Notice what Paul was inspired to write: "And [you] are *built* upon the *foundation* of the *apostles and prophets*, Jesus Christ himself being the *chief corner stone*"! (Eph. 2:20.)

So, while Peter, as a stone or pebble, forms part of the spiritual *foundation* of the true Church, Christ is its CHIEF CORNERSTONE — the main ROCK on which it is founded — and HE IS STILL ITS LIVING, ACTIVE HEAD!

"For the husband is the head of the wife, even as CHRIST IS THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH" (Eph. 5:23).

Christ did not give Peter the sole authority in the stead or PLACE of Christ's own authority! He was here speaking of the entire foundation — of HIMSELF and of all those who were used to write the Bible — "and upon THIS ROCK I will build my Church." (Christ is the chief cornerstone — the

Head. He is the ROCK SPOKEN OF SEVERAL TIMES IN Deut. 32. He is called the ROCK in I Cor. 10:4, and in *many* other scriptures.)

Wherever that Church is, *Jesus* is its HEAD. Not any man. Nor any woman.

And Jesus Christ is "the SAME yesterday, and today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8).

Of His own Church, Jesus said, "... The world hath *bated* them, because they are not OF the world" (John 17:14).

In this inspired instruction, just prior to His crucifixion, Christ revealed a great deal about His own Church. He said, "Ye have not chosen ME, but I have chosen YOU, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit" (John 15:16).

Christ promised that the society, the *world*, the system of things, or, the "around," would HATE His *true followers*! "If the world HATE you, ye know that it hated *me* before it hated you. If ye were *of the world*, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you *out* of the world, therefore the world HATETH YOU" (John 15:18-19.)

Jesus said that His hated group would finally be *so persecuted, so despised* by society, that the time would come when "They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever KILLETH you will think that he doeth God service" (John 16:2).

Think of it!

FAR from becoming more *respected* by the community, FAR from "joining" a group that will enhance your business opportunities, gain you more friends, or raise your social stratum, Jesus promised IF YOU ARE IN HIS TRUE CHURCH, you may be KILLED because of it!

It is no wonder, then, that Christ calls His true Church a LITTLE flock! "Fear not, *little flock*; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

What is His Church like?

It is a LITTLE Church! It is a group of sincere, CONVERTED, "called-out ones," who have COME OUT of this Babylon of confusion (Rev. 18:4) in repentance. It is a small, rejected, de-

spised body of believers who are doing the WORK of God.

Jesus *never* prophesied of His Church that it would become a large, impressive, politically powerful Church ruling over the nations in this age.

What Will It Be DOING?

Christ had a WORK to accomplish on earth. "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man *can* work" (John 9:4).

He said, "The works that I do in my Father's name, THEY BEAR WITNESS OF ME" (John 10:25).

Even though some may not have *believed* Christ, as a PERSON, He warned them to LOOK TO THE WORKS BEING ACCOMPLISHED for the PROOF they sought!

"If I do *not* the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, BELIEVE THE WORKS: that ye may *know*, and *believe*, that the Father is in me, and I in him" (John 10:37-38). The same is true of God's Church today!

During His earthly ministry, Christ called His disciples. His ministry was a personal TRAINING period for them! Many of His so-called "sermons" were NOT sermons, but personal, private INSTRUCTIONS to His disciples, who were to become *a part of the foundation* of the true Church of God! (See Matt. 5:1-2.)

But after Christ's death, burial and resurrection, He gave His Church a great twofold COMMISSION to fulfill!

"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, ALL POWER is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go YE therefore, and teach ALL NATIONS, baptizing them in [the Greek word is *eis*, meaning "into"] the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:18-20.)

Mark's account tells us Jesus said the apostles were to go "into *all the world*, and PREACH THE GOSPEL to every creature" (Mark 16:15.) Which gospel?

"And THIS GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM shall be preached in all

the world for a witness unto *all nations*; and THEN shall the end come" (Matt. 24:14.)

Wherever the CHURCH of GOD is — today — it will be PREACHING THAT SAME GOSPEL!

Jesus also told Peter THREE TIMES to *feed* the flock — which forms the *secondary* part of the great JOB which was given to the Church to accomplish! (John 21:15-17.)

Later, Peter repeated this great commission to those under his charge. He said, "Feed the flock of God which is among you" (I Pet. 5:2).

Wherever the CHURCH OF GOD is, it will be DOING that very work. It will be faithfully carrying out that twofold commission, just as Jesus PROPHESED IT WOULD!

Christ explained that, even though the Church would be LITTLE, and be WEAK during this age — it would have LITTLE strength — still, there would be OPEN DOORS supernaturally set before it — for the preaching of that Gospel (Rev. 3:8). The doors of RADIO, of TELEVISION, and of the PRINTING PRESS have been flung open before that *weak and little* group today!

Somehow, somewhere, Jesus *said very plainly*, there would be a little flock, despised by the world, weak in numbers and physical strength, but preaching the Gospel as a witness to all the world!

Then WHERE IS IT?

Many have written, wondering whether or not they should "join" one or another of the many different churches of the world.

This question is asked because people *assume*, vaguely, they should "attend some church." As one woman once said to me, "Well, I suppose we ought to have *some* faith."

You would be amazed to see the actual statistics as to WHY people attend their own churches.

Polls taken have revealed a wide variety of reasons for the present figures on church attendance in the United States. People attend "because it was the church they were reared in," "because they like the pastor," "because their friends go there," "because their relatives belong to the same church,"

"because a certain social level attends" — and they wish to "belong" to that level — "because the building is attractive," or "nearby," or "because they like the soloist," or "the choir," or "the organist," or, of all things, simply "because they like the parking facilities"!

A FEW attend their particular churches because they really believe their own church is right about its beliefs! But only a minority — not the majority — attend for this reason!

If someone offered you ONE MILLION DOLLARS in printed bills — all of them counterfeit, but some of them so excellently done so as to deceive even some of the top Treasury men themselves — what would you do? Suppose they were SO CLEVERLY made that only ONE EXPERT in the *entire world* could discern they were counterfeit. And, further, let's suppose you were offered, on the other hand, a crumpled old dollar bill — worn and used — but *authentic*, just the same.

WHICH would you choose?

ALL of the counterfeits — regardless of how seemingly *close* to the "real article" they may be — are worthless! But the one dollar that is authentic is *worth* far more than all the others put together — and even millions more like them!

The same thing is true of churches.

Why settle for a counterfeit? Even if it LOOKS like it may be "closer" to the truth than some others — WHY SETTLE FOR SECOND BEST?

There is only ONE CHURCH on the face of this earth that has been consistently, through *many years* of labor, preaching the ONE true Gospel of the Kingdom of God, telling you exactly what these times MEAN!

There is only ONE Church that has dared to tell you in definite, specific, point-by-point, detailed order the events that are yet to occur, whether or not Russia will strike the United States, what *will happen* in Europe, what WILL happen here in our country and all over the world, and what is sure to happen in the Middle East!

Some preachers may be vague, and say they somehow "feel" Jesus' return may be very near! They may say we are

coming closer to the end of the world. But are they telling you what specific nations will do? The exact weather conditions ahead? Are they opening up the Bible and expounding to you fearlessly in a point-by-point order — the real *meaning* of these mysterious books of prophecy? The symbols of Revelation? The *real meaning* of life? Who you are? Why you are? And where you're going? No!

Because they don't know these things!

Where is that ONE Church Jesus built?

It is where the WORK of that Church is being done!

And THIS WORK that you are reading of *right now* — that you *hear over The World Tomorrow* — this Work is the only genuine Work that is carrying out Jesus' very commission just as He said it would be doing!

How Do You Get into It?

Believe it or not, you cannot "join" the Church of God!

No one ever HAS — and *no one ever will!* God must PUT you into it!

As I have already explained, the Church is the Body of Christ. Just as Jesus Christ did the WORK of God on earth by the instrument of His own physical body — an instrument through which the Father was working — so the Church, which is Christ's body, is the INSTRUMENT through which Christ accomplishes that work today!

Immediately after the day of Pentecost, Monday, June 18, 31 A. D., the Church of God began to grow by leaps and bounds. Thousands were brought to real REPENTANCE, and were baptized.

When the Jews at Jerusalem heard Peter's inspired sermon, they asked, "Men and brethren, WHAT SHALL WE DO?" (Acts 2:37.)

Well, then, why didn't Peter seize his opportunity? Why didn't Peter tell them — "GO JOIN A CHURCH"?

Why didn't Peter say, "Talk to the counselors, and they'll help you select a church home"?

Simply because Peter knew better!

Instead, he said, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, "REPENT, and be *baptized* every one of you in the name of

Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

But did they then just become "Christians" and NOT members of a church?

Did they just go home— and stay at home, never to have membership in any church whatsoever?

Most certainly not!

Jesus inspired Paul to write, "Now if any man have *not* the Spirit of Christ, *he is none of his*" (Rom. 8:9). You don't *belong* to Christ until you receive His Spirit!

Peter said you can receive that Spirit by being obedient and REPENTING of your *sins*, which is the BREAKING, or the TRANSGRESSION, of God's LAW (I John 3:4) — by acknowledging that Jesus is your Saviour because He paid for your sins in your stead — by being *baptized* — and THEN you can receive the Spirit of Christ that makes you a Christian!

God will give that Spirit only to those who are willing to "OBEY Him"! (Acts 5:32.) When you receive God's Spirit — which is the spirit of a sound, sane mind (II Tim. 1:6-7) — YOU ARE AUTOMATICALLY PUT INTO THE BODY OF CHRIST, which is the CHURCH OF GOD! Notice it!

"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body" (I Cor. 12:13).

The receiving of God's Spirit and of the MIND OF CHRIST (Phil. 2:5) upon repentance and baptism PUTS YOU INTO, BAPTIZES YOU INTO, the Church!

Luke records, in the book of Acts, 'And the Lord *added* to the church *daily* such as SHOULD BE SAVED" (Acts 2:47). "And believers were the more ADDED to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women" (Acts 5:14).

Everywhere in early Church history you see God was ADDING repentant believers to His Church, which is Christ's body. Not one single converted person ever stepped forward and asked to JOIN!

Christ expressly says, "NO MAN CAN come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:44).

You can enter God's true Church by REPENTING OF YOUR DISOBEDIENCE TO God's Law, by calling on God's true

servants to baptize you, and by claiming God's promise of the gift of His Holy Spirit. In that way, and that way ONLY, does anyone enter into the Church.

Church attendance is not the most important thing! Church attendance by itself does not mean Church membership in God's sight!

Some believe if they can just get people to "go to a church" they have gotten them "saved"! That means they view "churchgoing" as an END IN ITSELF!

But it most definitely is not. It is, where *God has made it possible*, a MEANS to an end. God *does* instruct His true servants *not* to forsake the assembling of themselves together — and shows by His Word that *an assembly should NOT meet unless one of God's true MINISTERS is present* to FEED and GUIDE the flock!

But God forbids you ever to join in with the worship of counterfeit church bodies — no matter how close to the truth they seem! Only the genuine worship of God in His Church is acceptable to Him!

But God did not always make it possible! And so it is in *this age*!

God's Church HAS LITTLE STRENGTH! But it has *open doors* set before it, the doors of radio, television and the printing press, to carry the Gospel of the soon-coming Kingdom of God to the WHOLE WORLD as a last witness!

His Church is scattered. It is not noticed by the world. It is a "little flock." Many have an opportunity to meet, but others do not have the opportunity to attend a local congregation. They are "strangers and pilgrims" in this earth — looking for a BETTER WORLD — the WORLD TOMORROW!

Should you join a church? NO! BECAUSE ANY CHURCH YOU CAN "JOIN" IS NOT THE CHURCH OF GOD!

Personal Counsel

As a part of the ADULT EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM, we now have TRAINED MEN — graduates of AMBASSADOR COLLEGE — available in all parts of the United States and in many parts of the world, ready to counsel with you PERSONALLY — to answer questions — to help you with

any spiritual problems — even to baptize any who are ready for it, if any should, voluntarily, and with no solicitation from us, so desire. Please do not construe this announcement as an "invitation" of any sort — but from time to time, people write to us, wanting to know if a *personal* visit is possible.

Because we say in literature, and you hear on radio, "there is no follow-up — no one will call on you" — many may have MISUNDERSTOOD. What we mean to say to the public is that there will be no follow-up trying to sell them something, or trying to talk them into becoming a "member" of anything. We have NOTHING TO SELL. Giving us your name and address for requested literature, or for a subscription to any of our magazines (free — already paid) does not mean someone will come knocking uninvited on your door.

We WON'T send anyone to see you, UNWANTED. Not unless you REQUEST IT! But, if you would like one of our trained men, graduates of AMBASSADOR COLLEGE, to call and counsel with you about any problems, answer any questions — even explain anything in the Bible, there is such a man NEAR YOU! So please feel free to invite such a visit. That's what they are there for. And of course you know they have nothing to sell. They won't ask you for money. They won't plead with you — or even urge you — to "be converted" or baptized, or to join anything. Of course, if you WANT and request help in finding God and letting Christ REALLY come into your heart and life, they are fully qualified to HELP. But they will not try to shove anything on you. They are qualified to EXPLAIN the Bible if you ask, but never will they argue. Actually most of them are consecrated and ordained ministers. They, and we here at the Headquarters of this great Work, want only to HELP — to SERVE. We count it a PRIVILEGE to do so.

PROVE to yourself WHERE God's Church is — WHERE the WORK of that Church is being done — WHERE the MINISTERS of God are faithfully CRYING ALOUD, and SHOWING PEOPLE THEIR SINS — and don't settle for a counterfeit! □