

The Church of God (La Iglesia de Dios)

The Church of God - Where Is It?

THE CHURCH OF GOD - WHERE IS IT?

Christ said, *"I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."*
Matt.16:18. In our present age, the word "church" is difficult to biblically define. It is like many biblical terms which are translated from the Greek and can only be understood by the way they are used.

HOW DO WE VIEW THE WORD "CHURCH?"

Today the word can be used to refer to a building, the local church with its steeple, or it can mean an organized group of people who meet in that building. It can also refer to a combine of individual groups joined under a banner name like "Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist," and can be further defined as the corporate entity in charge of these groups. Each of these competing groups asserts that they have a special lock on salvation, setting them apart from all the rest, and some going as far as claiming that they are the One True Church of God, inferring that all others are false.

An interesting perspective to this is that some may grudgingly admit that members of other groups might find their way to their goal of an afterlife (salvation,) while thinking that their beliefs and practices are the real guarantee to life eternal, whether in heaven or here on a re-made earth as headquarters of the universe. *Rev.21:1-2. "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."*

Of course, it is preached that it is a chancy thing for one to leave the security of their particular group. In some congregations disagreeing with the dogma is a "death warrant;" Those who disagree are dis-fellowshipped; cast out.

NO UNITY OF BELIFES

By objectively examining the competing Christian churches teachings it is found that each has its own personalized doctrines which they claim are based on biblical scriptures, some of which is taken from the bible, but using them to a wrong end, mixing truth with error. The truth is skewed to meet their particular slant of scripture, fitting their beliefs. Mixing truth with error

The Church of God

(La Iglesia de Dios)

The Church of God - Where Is It?

makes it difficult for one to ascertain the truth of the bible in light of all these rival groups and their teachings.

Many church groups have taken the elitist position that the bible is too difficult for the average person to understand; saying that those formally trained and educated in theology are the only ones who can answer questions about the “good book” and its teachings. II Timothy 2:15 directs us to what we should be doing. *“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”* The words “rightly dividing” implies the action to cut straight and in order to build rightly one must cut according to the plan of God. The plan must be accurately understood before the cutting and building begins, which is the teaching of God’s word.

THE CHURCH OF THE BIBLE

If one wants to come to a true understanding of the great plan that God the Father has for mankind, one must come to understand what His Son Jesus taught about the way to salvation and the subject of churches. Beginning with a foundational scripture we read: Matt. 7:13-14. *“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life and there are few who find it.”*

Here Christ says there is a gate that could block the access to the way. This is not an ordinary gate like one found in a garden, but one that requires opening by an authorized person. The word used as gate is the same that is used of the temple gate; a gate that was only opened by the priesthood or the gate of a prison as in Acts 12:10, which was opened only by the jailer. In Acts 9:24 it is called the gate of a city, opened only by a city official.

Why the gate? Because not everyone is allowed in, for the gate is defined as “narrow,” showing it has a restrictive nature. Can we, of our own free will decide to enter? If this were true there would be no need for a gate. What may appear to be the obvious answer is that the ministry controls the gate. After all, was not Peter given the keys to the Kingdom? Were those keys not passed to the ministry so that in our present age the ministry controls the gate? Are they not the ones who decide who is put on the membership roll of the church, or who should be removed from that list? Have they not thrown the gates wide open, inviting anyone who cares to come? They preach, “Just accept Christ as your savior and you are in, your salvation is a

The Church of God

(La Iglesia de Dios)

The Church of God - Where Is It?

lock”, or members are taught the dogma of that organization and would be expected to believe it. By believing they become a member, assuring their salvation. They are not taught to read and study the bible to find truth; but to accept the teaching of paid professionals as truth.

WHO CONTROLS THE GATE?

Can the plan that God is working out on this earth be known? How can we know that we are walking that narrow path? And who is the only one who can open the gate to the truth? John 6:44 & 6:65 gives us the answer. *“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.”* Vs 65, *“And He said, ‘Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.’”*

“In that hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit and said, ‘I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight.’” Luke 10:21.

So who is the one controlling the gate? Obviously it is the one who opens the gate to our minds so that we can understand truth. John’s statement about the Father is clear. The “no one” is definitive. In Strong’s “no one” is number 3762. From the Complete Word Study Dictionary, New Testament, the following definition is found. *“(II) Used in the absolute sense as a subject, the Greek word, oudeis, meaning no one, no man, no person.”* It is the Father’s prerogative to call whom He wills.

There are some who come to this gate, see it and wonder where it leads? They have a curiosity as to what is behind the gate, but it is not open to them. Why? Because the way is difficult. In His infinite wisdom the Father does not want any to fail. Once the gate is opened to a person, and they enter to pursue a way that is not easy, there can be no turning back. Luke 9:62. *“But Jesus said to him, no one having put his hand to the plow, and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God.”*

IS FAILURE POSSIBLE?

In addition, Hebrews 6, verse 4-6 tells us, *“For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and having tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to*

The Church of God

(La Iglesia de Dios)

The Church of God - Where Is It?

renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.”

“For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.” (Heb. 10:26-27)

To completely understand the principal of who calls and who reveals read Matt. 11:26-27. *“Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and He to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.”* Also, in Luke 10:22 it says, *“All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is but the Father, and who the Father is but the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.”* One of the main tasks Christ was given was to reveal the Father. It is the Father who calls, and the Son who then reveals Him and His plan for a great future that awaits mankind. It is through the pages of the bible that the plan of God is revealed through His Spirit.

As has been shown above it is the Father who controls the gate of our minds and moves us to understand truth; to understand who our redeemer Christ is, and the example He has set for us to follow.

HOW TO ENTER THE GATE

There remains a crucial step before passing through the gate to proceed down the narrow path to salvation. God holds the gate open, but each must make the final decision to pass through it. That is, to repent of our past sins and be baptized and to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands. Acts 2:36-39. *“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ. 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. For the promise is to you and your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”* Paul writes in Rom.6:3-4, *“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized*

The Church of God (La Iglesia de Dios)

The Church of God - Where Is It?

into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into His death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

The Father's part does not end with His choosing who may come to Christ, but They then become an integral part of our lives after repentance and baptism. John 5:17. *"But Jesus answered them, 'My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.'" Now, the question is, what work is the Father doing? As has been pointed out, it is the Father who chooses us, not Christ. Biblically it was the Father who arranged the marriage of His Son. Christ is revealing this in Matthew 22, the parable of the wedding supper. It was the king who invited the guests, and determined who would be qualified to remain as a guest. The parable in Matt. 22:11 explains this. "But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"*

It is curious that the king calls this offender "friend" just before he condemns him. The word "friend" used here presents a problem, which is cleared up when the meaning is understood in the Greek. It is "hetros," #2083 in Strong's Concordance, meaning one who is a friend for what he can gain from the relationship: money, status, etc., by showing a fawning attitude to those in authority.

The wedding garment is a metaphor for the kind of person confronted by the king. His character did not exemplify that of Christ.

WHO GIVES DIRECTION?

In John 15:1-2 the answer is found to what the Father has been doing and what He continues to do. *"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vine dresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes that it may bear more fruit."*

In these two verses Christ is revealing a foundational truth. Not only is the Father choosing who may enter the gate, but He takes the further responsibility of preparing the individuals who are traversing the narrow way of Matthew 7 so that they may be able to take their place at the

The Church of God

(La Iglesia de Dios)

The Church of God - Where Is It?

wedding supper. Remember! The king had the one who came to the wedding supper without the right character cast into outer darkness – destroyed by death thereby losing his opportunity to life forever.

What becomes of those cast out? John 15:6. *“If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.”*

John 15, verses 1 & 2 is a metaphor in which the Father is being compared to a worker who is responsible for the health of the vines, and also responsible to insure that the vines would not only produce grapes, but produce more than expected. He removes the branches that do not produce and prunes the remaining branches so they produce more.

What Christ tells us here is that the Father is intimately involved in our lives. He not only draws us out of this world and to His Son, but He prepares us for that great event, the marriage of His Son. Rev. 19:7. *“Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.”*

THE FATHER DOES THE CHOOSING

It could be said that He is working with those He has called from birth, as the example seen in Jeremiah 1:5. *“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; and I ordained you a prophet to the nation.”* Rom. 1:1. *“Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God.”* John 9:1-3. *“Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. And His disciples ask Him, saying, ‘Rabi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind’. Jesus answered, ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.’”*

These men had no realization that the Father was putting them through life experiences that would prepare them for that time when He deemed it right that they should see the truth. Each one is dealt with in a way that brings them to the truth. For some it may be as simple as having a real desire to search for the reason that we exist. For others it might be a painful, dramatic experience that gets their attention to turn their life to God. A case in point: Paul’s conversion in Acts 9 where the Father sent Christ to blind Paul to untrack Paul’s mind from persecuting the Christians and then to a life of service to those he was persecuting. The scripture proving that

The Church of God (La Iglesia de Dios)

The Church of God - Where Is It?

the Father was responsible for this is in Gal. 4:1-6: *“Who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel.....”* Remember who Christ said was responsible for dragging us to the truth. Remember Paul blindness!

THE BIBLE’S CENTRAL FIGURE

These scriptures are a direct challenge to the dogma of what the large established churches are teaching that Christ is the central figure and the Father is relegated to a figurehead. What is obvious is made plain by the number of times that Jesus speaks of the Father and shows that the Father has the primary position. In the book of Matthew, Christ refers to the Father forty times, and in the book of John it is a staggering one hundred and ten times. These are not just mere references, but clear explanations of who the Father is, what He is doing, and that He is the one who has the ultimate control of this planet and the people on it.

For many the following scriptures will come as a surprise. Who is the One who sent Christ? John 13:16. *Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him.* Verse 20. *Most assuredly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent me.”* It shows here that the Father is greater than Christ whom He sent. John 14:28. *“You have heard Me say to you, I am going away and coming back to you. If you love Me, you would rejoice because I said, I am going to the Father, for My Father is greater than I.”* Who taught the savior once He became human? John 8:28. *“Then Jesus said to them, ‘When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I AM He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things.”*

John 7:15-17. *“And the Jews marveled, saying, ‘How does this Man know letters, having never studied?’ Jesus answered them and said, ‘My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent me. If anyone wants to do His will he will know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority.’”*

Remember John 15:1 & 2 as Christ applies this to us as it was also applied to our Savior. In Matthew 4 it is seen that the Father allowed the tempter (Satan) to tempt Christ when He would be most vulnerable as He was coming to the end of His fast. In the story of Job it is seen

The Church of God

(La Iglesia de Dios)

The Church of God - Where Is It?

that the Father allows Satan a great deal of latitude in testing Job. It is repeated in Matthew 4, and James clarifies this. James 1:13-14. *"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God;' for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed."*

It is our own human nature which presents the problem that must be overcome. Christ, being human, had the same drives and desires as all men have. Hebrew 4:15. *"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin."*

THE FRUIT THE FATHER LOOKS FOR

An additional point must be understood before grasping the true meaning of the word "church." When our Lord says the Father trims us so that we bear more fruit, the accepted teaching has been that this represents our work converting others to accept Christ as their savior. But recall Christ's words twice stated that it is only the Father who has the prerogative of calling one to Christ. Then what does the fruit represent? Eph. 4:13. *".....till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;"* The point here is that we must think and act like Christ. That is the fruit.

Eph. 4:11-12. *"And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers. Why? ".....For the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ."* It is through the work of faithful men who are teaching others to follow the narrow path that leads to eternal life once the Father chooses who will enter through the narrow gate. *"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."* Rom. 10:17.

Another scripture that will help us understand who our head is can be found in I Cor. 11:3. *"But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God."* From this scripture we know that no man, no minister, no priest or pope stands between us and Christ. Each individual has direct access to our Savior and our Father. John 20:17. "Jesus said to her, do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.'"

The Church of God (La Iglesia de Dios)

The Church of God - Where Is It?

THE JOB OF THE MINISTRY

If this is true why are there statements of human rulers found in the scriptures, such as Matthew 24:45? *“Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season?”*

The term “made ruler” is a single Greek word, number 2525 meaning “set over.” This person who is set over is a servant who is not there to rule, but to serve. It is made clear by understanding that his duties are for the good of the household. Household is number 2322 with the following explanation. “Therapeia is a feminine noun from therapeuo (2323); to heal, to serve. (voluntary service, attendance, ministry, and in the care of the sick by implication relief, healing.) (Luke 9:11, Rev. 22:2); metaphorically and collectively meaning attendance, domestics, retinue.” (Matt. 24:45).

The word “food,” 5160 is being used figuratively for spiritual instruction. Obviously this is a position of service, not ruler-ship. This servant is to provide spiritual food to those in the household of God, and the word for household carries the meaning of spiritually sick people in need of spiritual healing; that is, the knowledge and encouragement so they can walk the narrow path in life.

In the book of Hebrews, chapter 13 there are two places where one Greek word, number 2233, is translated “those which have the rule over you”. These seven words are used for one Greek word. The true meaning of this word rule is to go before, or lead the way. This scripture has been corrupted by the translation of the word “rule,” and in another scripture the word “obey” is corrupted. There was a sinister intent in translating these words. The true meaning is “they are to set the example for others to follow; leading the way by example. In this same chapter, in verse 17, the word “obey” is being used for the Greek word number 3982, meaning “to persuade, particularly to move or affect by kind words or motives (by example).”

THE HIDDEN MEANING

Why were these scriptures twisted in the translation? Look at the one who had the final authority for the first accepted English translation, King James. It was his purpose to cement the king’s authority over the church. Why have these mistranslations not been corrected? Ask

The Church of God (La Iglesia de Dios)

The Church of God - Where Is It?

yourself the question, “Which church organization would want to relinquish their own absolute authority over its members?” Answer: NONE!

In Hebrews 13:17 as seen above the number 2233 is used for those who have the rule over you. The understanding of these verses should be that those leading the way have no authority to make anyone obey. These scriptures are often used by ministers to compel others to do their bidding. The truth is, men are free moral agents who need to make up their own minds and then follow only those who faithfully lead the way on the narrow path to life.

I Cor. 11:1 will give clarity to Hebrews 13. *“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.”* We are to make an ultimate decision based on Christ’s life as a copy for our own life.

BIBLE DEFINITION OF CHURCH

Now it is time to look at the word “church” and understand its true meaning. It is numbered in Strong’s as 1577, and has the following meaning from the Complete Word Study Book, New Testament. The Greek word is ekklesia. It is a feminine noun from ekkletos (n.f.) {meaning not used in the New Testament.}

Note: All references to Greek words come from this word study book.

Remember, there are only a few who find the gate, and it can only be found if the Father calls (drags) one to the truth, opening their eyes to a different way of life. Matt: 18:20. *“For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”*

Called out, which is from ekkaleo (n.f.), to call out. It was a common term for a congregation of the ekkletoi (n.f.), the called people, or those called out or assembled in the public affairs of a free state, the body of free citizens called together by a herald. (kerux 2783) which constituted the ekklesia. In the New Testament the word is applied to the congregation of the people of Israel. Acts 7:38, meaning all those that the Father calls.

Even though the two main words used to define ekklesia are not used in the New Testament they are essential to understand this root word as it is presently defined as church. Those who are called are free men. In our case it is the calling that frees us to understand truth, which is

The Church of God

(La Iglesia de Dios)

The Church of God - Where Is It?

the important message of the bible. John 8:32 *"You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"*.

THE TRUE MEANING APPLIED

The true meaning of ekklesia is "those called of God," clarifying the translation. Using this terminology makes the scriptures become more meaningful as the following examples show.

Acts 20:28, *"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to shepherd the called of God which He purchased with his own blood."*

I Cor.10:32 *"Give no offence, either to the Jews or the Greeks or to the called of God ..."*

I Cor.11:22, *"What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the called of God and shame those who have nothing?"*

I Cor.15:9, *"For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the called of God."*

Gal.1:13, *"For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the called of God beyond measure and tried to destroy them."*

I Cor.1:2, *"The called of God which are at Corinth."*

I Tim.3:5, *"For if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of those called of God?"*

I Tim.3:15, *"But if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the called of the Living God....."*

These are a sampling of the scriptures in the bible showing that the word "church" represents those whom the Father has called out of this world for His purpose and who have repented, been baptized and have received the gift of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands. They then follow the narrow path. Remember! Christ said there would be few who find the way – not the many. He also said it would be difficult. Why? Because it requires a change of character; a change in the way we conduct our lives so that we mirror the life of Christ. II Cor 5:21. *"For He*

The Church of God

(La Iglesia de Dios)

The Church of God - Where Is It?

made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

What should our goal in this life be? I John 2:3 *"Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments."* Without question this is our goal. Therefore it becomes fundamental that sin should not be found in us. What is sin? In the plainest terms possible I John 3:4 will give the answer. *"Whosoever commits sin transgresses also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law."*

In summary it is not the great organized churches of this world that will put us in the Body of Christ, but the calling of the Father and the response one makes. Rev. 17:14. *"..... for He is the Lord of Lords and King of Kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful."*

The way we conduct our lives is what places us among the truly called of God, not a membership in an organization.

Don Roth

12-21-16