



The Reflector

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Choosing A Church

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The New Testament teaches that there is but **one** church and also that there are **many** churches. Paul said he persecuted “the church (singular) of God.” (1 Cor. 15:9). The record shows that he persecuted Christians in various places. In the same epistle he spoke of “the churches (plural) of God.” (1 Cor. 11:16).

In 15:9, he is speaking of Christians everywhere. This “church” is a group term for all saved people. This is the one group or number to which one is added when he is saved. “And the Lord added to the **church** daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:47 NKJV). “And the Lord was adding to their **number** day by day those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:47 NASB).

In 11:16, he is speaking of groups of Christians organized to worship and work together in various locations like “the **churches** of Galatia.” (Gal. 1:2). The New Testament is clear that one who has been added to “the church” (the body or number of the saved) is expected to join himself to one of these “churches of God” to work and worship together as a unit. (Cf. Acts 9:26-28).

This means that a Christian must choose one of these groups to “place his membership.” He is already a member of the universal “church of God” which includes all who have been added to it in the world. Choosing a local church is usually not a complicated process. In many cases there is already a group (church) in his area with whom he can scripturally jointly work and worship as a unit. If there is not, then he can work toward starting one.

In many cases there are several prospective groups, one of which he can join himself, in order to worship and do the work that God has authorized local churches to do. This is the situation in many areas in this country today, including our area. So one just saved or has just moved into the area is faced with the task of choosing one of these churches. The task is now a bit more complicated. One cannot join himself to them all, so he may need to “shop around” to find one with whom he can identify. What should he look for? A perfect church? If that is the litmus test, then none of them will pass muster, because all are made up of human beings who are far from perfect. If he were to find such a group, then its perfection would be compromised the moment he joined the group because he is not perfect.

One often makes a mistake in his choice because of the way he prioritizes what he is looking for in a church. He often looks at the characteristics that individual Christians are to have, placing these near the top of his list – friendliness, hospitable, caring, compassionate, and helpful. He visits a church and is favorably impressed when these things seem to stand out. On this basis, he decides that this is the congregation for him. But what about what they do as a church – their corporate worship and work, the kind of teaching/preaching they offer week after week, the nature of their organization, etc.? These become kind of peripheral to the other matters. He salves his consciences by pointing out that while the congregation he has chosen may not be fully

scriptural in these areas, they are so much more caring, hospitable, compassionate and personally helpful than the people in other congregation(s) he has considered.

It is great when one finds a congregation that has all the desirable corporate characteristics mentioned above, along with the friendliness, hospitality, compassion, etc. of its members standing out. However, often such is not the case. One needs to understand he can still be friendly, hospitable, and compassionate even if fellow members are not. Being in the same congregation does make him a party to their personal shortcomings.

But, by joining a congregation, one necessarily becomes a part of its corporate structure and is committed to being a participant in its collective worship and work. But if these are not right, he cannot fulfill his commitment to share in its corporate activities. He cannot afford to be a part of the corporate worship if it is not scriptural. He cannot be a part of the corporate work if it is unscriptural. He cannot be a tied to its corporate structure if it is unscriptural.

A final thought. Christians do not have a lock on friendliness, hospitality, etc. If one is primarily looking for friendliness, hospitality, caring, compassion, and helpfulness, then he can find that among members of religious organizations that do not even profess to follow the New Testament order. It would not be hard to find a group with these qualities, equal to, if not surpassing, many of those professing New Testament Christianity.

So, while we should all strive to constantly improve in all these personal qualities, we must recognize that a group's excelling in such does not necessarily make them a group of which a Christian should be a part. ■

From the Upper Room to the Garden Tomb

Grover Stevens

The twenty-four hours between Thursday afternoon and Friday afternoon of "Passion Week"

were the most momentous in history -- together with those pertaining to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (Rom. 4:24-25).

At the Passover supper, Jesus points out Judas as the betrayer and he leaves, the Lord then tells them of his approaching death, and warns the disciples of the extreme danger and temptation they are about to face. After supper the Lord then institutes the Lord's Supper (Lk. 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25), gives his farewell discourse (Jn. 14), they sing a hymn and depart.

It was about midnight when Jesus and the disciples left the upper room. As they walked along the slopes of Mt. Zion on the crisp, moonlit night, looking down on the Garden of Gethsemane just across the brook Kedron, Jesus spoke the parable of the Vine and the Husbandman, taught them to abide in his love by keeping his commandments, to love one another, and promised them another Comforter (Jn. 15). In the 14th, 15th and 16th chapters of John, Christ presents the fullest treatise on the work of the Holy Spirit that is found in the Bible.

Christ's Intercessory Prayer (John 17)

Since the Temple was located on their way to Gethsemane it is altogether probable that this majestic, high-priestly prayer of Jesus was spoken in the great court of the temple, now flooded with moonlight and deserted at this time of night except for these twelve. It manifests an air of triumph and glory. In widening circles, Jesus prays first for himself that the divine glory may now be consummated; then for his disciples, that they may remain one in the faith through their faithfulness to the truth - his Word; then for all those who will become disciples in all future generations "through their word" "that they all may be one" as "Thou, Father, art in Me and I in Thee"; and last of all, for all the world, that it may believe in him because of the oneness and faithfulness of all who believe in him by adhering to the divine revelation - the New Covenant - which was delivered to the world through the apostles by the Holy Spirit.

After this prayer, they cross the brook Kedron and enter the Garden of Gethsemane at the foot of

mount of Olives. Here Jesus tells the disciples to watch and pray that they enter not into temptation, while he goes aside to pray. Then ensued the awful and memorable agony.

His Arrest And Trial

Judas comes with the mob, which included the chief priests, captains of the temple and elders; Jesus is arrested and bound, and the disciples flee.

In the early morning hours, perhaps 3 a.m., Jesus is taken to the palace of Annas, the Ex-High-Priest, for trial (John 18:13-23). Annas was an old man of seventy, who had been high priest a score of years before, and still retained the title, though his son-in-law, Caiaphas, was actual high priest at this time. He had five of his sons to serve as high priest in the interim. He was extremely wealthy and influential. It was here that one of the officers slapped Jesus in the face. Jesus did not “turn the other cheek,” but exercised his “constitutional right” by mildly but firmly remarking, “If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you smite me?”

From Annas Jesus was taken before Caiaphas, who was the, ruling High Priest, and president of the Sanhedrin Council, the highest Jewish assembly for government. The palace of Caiaphas was either very near or probably a part of the same large complex with Annas with one living in one wing and the other in another. There would be a large hall for meetings and gatherings and a court yard. It was not legal for this court to meet before sunrise, but they were eager to get to work, both to gratify their own resentment of Jesus and to work out their proceedings so that when the legal hour for the court to convene arrives, they will only have to repeat the necessary formalities, and thus minimize the chances of the people interfering with their proceedings, and also will be ready the sooner to get the approval of the Roman governor. So, while Jerusalem slept, these eager judges hurried along with their evil plans.

Jesus looked on in silence while the contradictory testimonies of the witnesses demolished each other. He thus, quietly took his natural position far above his judges, and they felt

it. At last the president asked Jesus under oath if “Thou art the Christ, the Son of God.” To refuse to answer would have been taken as a virtual denial of his Messiahship, so he answers calmly and clearly, “I am,” and continued, “Moreover the day will come when this court will stand before (me) at the right hand of Power (God) and be judged.” With a great show of horror, the high priest “rent his garments, saying, he hath spoken blasphemy: what further need have we to witnesses?” The court then condemned him to death. All they need do now is wait for the formal Council after sunrise and they will be ready to take him to the Roman governor to obtain the death sentence and get the execution on the road.

Peter’s Denial of the Lord

(Mk. 14:54,66-72)

It was during this trial that Peter, who had followed afar off and was in the court yard, denied the Lord three times. After his first denial the cock crew once (a reminder), and after his third denial the cock crew the second time. Peter then remembered that the Lord had told him during supper that he would do this. He went out and wept bitterly. The cock crowing tells us that daybreak is nearing.

Trial Before Pilate

When it was daylight Friday morning, the Sanhedrin officially convened and confirmed their previous verdict of his being guilty of blasphemy and worthy of death. They led him bound with chains to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor over Judea, because only the Roman authorities had the power to put a person to death.

At the “praetorium,” the magnificent palace of Herod the Great, Pilate’s residence and judgment hall when in Jerusalem, Jesus was turned over to soldiers to take to Pilate, but the chief priests refused to go in lest they defile themselves because they had not yet eaten the passover. (Evidently these had been so busy planning, preparing for the arrest and trial of Jesus that they didn’t have time to eat the Passover Supper Thursday evening at the proper time.) So, Pilate came out to them (Jn. 18:29).

After examination Pilate found Jesus innocent of the charge of being a king in sedition to Caesar. The Jews cried out in disappointed rage, loudly shouting the charges over and over. When Pilate heard the mention that Jesus was from Galilee, he sought to escape the responsibility of executing an innocent man by sending him to Herod Antipas, who also was in Jerusalem at this time, and who was the governor of the territory of Galilee. Herod also found him innocent (Lk. 23:15), mocked him, and sent him back to Pilate. After two feeble attempts to set Jesus free, by their custom of releasing a prisoner at this feast, and by scourging him, both of which failed, and after announcing again that both he and Herod had found “nothing worthy of death in him,” and washing his hands before them to demonstrate his verdict, Pilate yielded to the growing tumultuous demands of the Jews and sentenced him to be crucified. John tells us that the time was “about the sixth hour,” that is, within that hour between 6 and 7 o’clock (Roman time).

Judas, when he saw that Jesus was condemned to death, was filled with remorse, went back to the chief priests in the temple, expressed his regrets, threw the money at their feet, and went out and hanged himself.

Jesus’ Crucifixion

The soldiers and mob then take Jesus and mock and abuse him. Finally, his journey to a hill outside the city, called “Golgotha,” bearing his cross, along with two criminals begins. Shortly a man named Simon of Cyrene is compelled to bear the cross for him the rest of the way. No reason is given for this in the Scriptures; probably because the fatigue of Christ, exhausted by the distressful night, the trials and the scourging and abuse. Mark tells us the crucifixion took place at the “third hour,” 9 a.m. (Jewish time), on Friday (the day of “Preparation, that is the day before the sabbath,” Mk. 15:25,42). From the “sixth hour” to the “ninth hour” (noon to 3 p.m.) there was darkness over all the land. At the “ninth hour” there was an earthquake, the veil of the temple was rent in twain, and tombs were

opened, as Jesus “gave up the ghost” and died (Mk. 15:33-37).

Shortly after this the legs of the robbers were broken in order to hurry their death, but the legs of Jesus were not broken since he was already dead, but they thrust a spear into his side, probably his heart. This was done so “that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath day” which would begin at 6:00 p.m. And too, this particular Sabbath was a “high day,” that is it had double significance because it was the Sabbath of the Passover week.

Immediately after it was determined that Jesus was dead, Joseph of Arimathea goes to Pilate and asks for the body of Jesus. After verifying this fact with the Centurion, Pilate grants his request. The body of Jesus was taken down from the cross, partially anointed, wrapped and laid in Joseph’s own new tomb in a garden nearby. The women “beheld the tomb and how his body was laid,” when a great stone had been rolled over the entrance, they returned to their homes, and prepared some spices before 6 o’clock when the Sabbath began (see Lk. 23:53-56).

The next day, “the day after the Preparation” (after 6 p.m. Friday), the Jews ask Pilate for a guard, and the guard was placed and the tomb was sealed.

When He was buried their hopes were all dashed to pieces for there was not a single human being that believed he would ever rise again before the end of the world. Even Peter and John, as John himself informs us, “knew not the Scripture, that He must rise from the dead.”

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About Religious Divisions ...

It is amazing how many people think that all religious divisions can be cured by more love and “better attitudes.” These assume that hatred and bad attitudes must have caused the divisions in the first place. This may have been in some cases, but not in all cases. In more cases than not, the difference is doctrinal leading to differences of faith and practice. EB