

HOW CAN I FIND THE RIGHT CHURCH?

By Prince Nweke Sylvanus

With more than 500 different denominations in this country, Nigeria, it is not surprising that many folk are confused. The question is often heard, "How can I be sure which is the right church?" That question should be asked, and it also should be answered with a much better reply than is usually heard: "Which one doesn't matter, for one church is as good as another." The truth is that Jesus built only one church, not many (Matthew 16:18). He died for one church (Ephesians 5:25); He shed His blood for one church (Acts 20:28); He is the head of one church (Colossians 1:18); and He is married to that one church (Ephesians 5:23-32). That obviously does not mean that "one church is as good as another," now, does it?

The apostle Paul, in the first generation of the church, revealed that ". . . some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits. . ." (I Timothy 4:1). He further warned that, because some people do not have a love for the truth, ". . . God sendeth them a working of error, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be judged who believed not the truth..." (II Thessalonians 2:10-12). The multitude of denominations are the direct result of "... they will not endure the sound doctrine, but, having itching ears, will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts" (II Timothy 4:3). When people reject the truth of God and follow teachers who tell them what they want to hear, new religious groups result. That is what a denomination is.

We look around and see "many churches." Is there a way to tell which, if any, is the right one? Can there even be one that is right? Let us recognize, first, that the church is a people: "The Lord added to the church daily such as were being saved. He is the head of the body, the church. We, who are many, are one body in Christ" (Acts 2:47; Colossians 1:18; Romans 12:5).

When you look for "the right church," you must look at the people who compose that church. Therefore, let us find some of the requirements, if we would honestly answer the question, "How can I find the right church?" What kind of people will we find when we find the right church?

THEY WILL BELIEVE AND FOLLOW THE WORD OF GOD

As the prophet wrote, "It is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). The right church will be composed of people who look to God for guidance, who respect His word and study it diligently (II Timothy 2:15). Jesus told the apostles, "Whoever heareth you me; he that that you rejecteth me; and he that rejecteth me, rejecteth Him that sent me" (Luke 10:16). Christ is ". . . the mediator of a new covenant" (Hebrews 9:15), and that is what the apostles preached. Paul said, ". . .when you received from us the word of the message, even the word of God, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God" (I Thessalonians 2:13). The right church will adhere to that teaching found in the word of Christ, the New Testament.

We must recognize that we are "justified by faith" (Romans 5:1). The right church will teach that. Not by our own works, but "by grace are ye saved through faith" (Ephesians 2:8). Acceptable faith is clearly defined in the Scriptures: "By faith Abel offered unto God a more

excellent sacrifice . . . by faith Noah prepared an ark . . . by faith Abraham obeyed" (Hebrews 11:4-8). To find what God wants us to do, to believe Him and His promises, then to do what He tells us-that is acceptable faith. In fact, God warns that if we have faith and not works, that faith is dead and cannot save us (James 2:17-24). The right church will believe the word of God and act on what it teaches. It does no good to sing, *How I love Jesus*, unless we do what He says! As He put it, "If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments . . . This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments" (John 14:15 & I John 5:3). The right church will be active doing what the Lord teaches through His holy will, the bible.

THEY WILL TEACH THE SIMPLE PLAN OF SALVATION

Why complicate? Jesus made it simple, and His apostles kept it simple. We are "saved by grace through faith" (Ephesians 2:8), if we are saved at all. God's grace, as manifest in all that Jesus Christ has done for us, brings the response of man's faith (Hebrews 11:4-8). Notice how Paul wrote of our salvation by grace through faith: "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in His blood . . . Being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For, if when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son . . . Are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death" (Romans 3:23-25; 5:9, 10; 6:3)? We have access by faith into this grace (Romans 5:2) when that "faith works by love" (Galatians 5:6) in doing the will of God.

Jesus set forth very simple terms for our salvation. He showed that we must believe (John 3:16; 8:24; Mark 16: 16). That faith is to lead us to repent of our sins: "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all in like manner perish" (Luke 13:3). The Lord also said, "He that confesseth me before men, him will I confess before my Father, which is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32).

In the *great commission*, Jesus promised that "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). The apostles, in accord with that New Testament commission preached the gospel of Christ to people lost in sin. They heard, believed, repented, confessed faith in Christ and were baptized into Christ (Acts 2:36-41; 8:35-39; 16:31-34; 22:16; Romans 6:3-6). When they did that, the Lord added them to *the right church* (Acts 2:47). The right church still teaches that, and the right church still grows in the exact same way.

THEY WORSHIP BY NEW TESTAMENT AUTHORITY

The pattern of worship of the church of the New Testament was very simple. Even though they were familiar with the Sabbath of the Jews, Christians met "on the first day of the week" (Acts 20:7). The Lord arose from the dead on the first day of the week (Matthew 28: 1-6 & Mark 16:9). The Lord appeared to the apostles on the first day of the week (John 20:1-19 & 20:26).

The church began on the first day of the week (Acts 2: 1-47). Early Christian writings confirm that the practice of the early church was to assemble each first day of the week for worship.

When the disciples assembled for worship, they studied together from the word of God (Acts 2:42 & 20:7). Without the use of instruments of music, they were "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). The right church still does that. The right church, believing firmly that God answers their prayers (James 5:16), often prays together (Acts 2:42; 12:12; Philippians 4:6). They come together "on the first day of the week to break bread" (Acts 20:7), thus commemorating regularly the death of the Savior (I Corinthians 11:23-28) as their sacrifice for sin. And on the first day of the week, they "lay by in store" (I Corinthians 16:2), giving cheerfully and liberally for the Lord's cause (II Corinthians 8:5, 8 & 9:6-8). The right church still does this.

THE LOCAL CHURCH IS SCRIPTURALLY ORGANIZED

The New Testament reveals, and history confirms the fact, that the churches of Christ (Romans 16:16), 1900 years ago, were autonomous. That is, they were bound together by a common faith and love, but they were not bound by any kind of organizational structure. Each congregation (local church) selected her own leaders (Acts 6:1-6). Not even the apostles being with them could change that! No man, no group of men, no congregation ever selected leaders for those in another local church.

It was, and is, God's plan that each local church would have elders (Acts 14:23 & Titus 1:5). These men were called "pastors, bishops, elders, shepherds" (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 4:11; I Peter 5:1-3). They were to "oversee" the church, tending to the "flock of God which is among you" (I Peter 5:2, 3). Members were told, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit to them: for they watch in behalf of your souls" (Hebrews 13: 17). The elders were the only ones in the New Testament church to rule, oversee or shepherd the church.

In the local church, there were also "deacons" and "ministers", (Philippians 1:1; I Timothy 3:8-12; Philippians 2:25). These all served under the oversight of the elders in the various areas of service that were needed in the local church (Acts 6:1-6). In the New Testament church, there was never a "one-man rule," and the deacons and/or ministers were not the decision-making group. The elders (always plural) had the oversight of the local church. In the right church, it is still this way.

THEIR HOPE WAS TO LIVE ETERNALLY IN HEAVEN

Jesus made this promise, "I go to prepare a place for you...that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:2, 3). Peter spoke of the death and resurrection of Jesus as a pledge of that promise: "God...begot us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you" (I Peter 1:3, 4).

The hope of Christians 1900 years ago was not on this earth, but beyond this life. The apostle Paul wrote, "For me to live is Christ, to die is gain.... There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.... We know, if the earthly house of your tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens" (Philippians 1:21; II Timothy 4:8; II Corinthians 5:1).

The right church still has that same hope. Because they believed Jesus, his followers "went everywhere preaching the word" (Mark 16:20). They knew that "the gospel is the power of God unto salvation" (Romans 1:16), so they told their neighbors and friends and relatives about the wonderful Savior they had found (John 4:29, 30; Acts 5:42; 8:4). They were concerned about lost souls, so they used every means they could to tell others about Christ.

The right church still does that. Because someone cares for your soul, you are reading this paper. Thousands of copies of this tract are in circulation as a means of reaching out to those who need the Savior.

How can you find the right church? Go to God's word, find what the church should be, then find a group that is identical to what you read in God's word. We urge you to investigate the Church of Christ.

WILL YOU INVESTIGATE IT?

Much of the worship in the past has been vain, being corrupted by doctrines of men (Matthew 15:8, 9). Much preaching on the plan of salvation has not been in harmony with the word of God (Matthew 7:13, 14 & 21-24). Religious error damns the souls of men! It's tragic to make the same mistakes in each generation! You have God's word; why not investigate the religious tenets that bind you? Jesus said, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). We invite you to investigate His word with us and then help us restore New Testament Christianity. We cordially invite you to the Church of Christ.

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Mission Printing, Inc.
WORLD EVANGELISM BY THE PRINTED PAGE
Arlington, Texas

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