

# CHURCH

*A plea for simplicity!*



**By:**  
***Frederick L. Pattison,***  
***A Christian!***

**"Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but **encouraging** one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching." (Hebrews 10:22-25)**

The biblical quotes in this booklet are taken from the *Today's New International Version* (TNIV). When quotes appear from other versions they are noted. I have also taken the liberty to place caps on pronouns referring to Deity.

## Introduction

I have been involved in church my entire lifetime. A few years ago I wrote a booklet titled "**Rethinking Church!**" The material in that booklet created a stir among some who read it. Through the years I have been somewhat controversial often disturbing the status quo. I continue to hold and advocate some concepts that are considered radical by **some "church folk."** In this booklet you will find some duplication from my previous booklet. Whether you agree or disagree with my premise, as relating to **church**, I encourage you to approach this material with an open mind. I am not under a misguided illusion that my small voice is going to *change* the church at large. Yet, my hope is that some who read this booklet may reevaluate "**the church;**" both *local and beyond*. When you have completed reading I am open to dialog. I appreciate receiving feedback on the material that I write, publish and distribute.

I began writing this material as I was at home recuperating from a number of health problems that I experienced during 2009. These problems included open heart surgery that led to a number of complications. During that time I also had considerable loss of blood. All this resulted in mini-strokes. During that time I came close to dying. This has made mortality and eternity more real to me than I had ever experienced before. As I am now continuing to heal I am getting back into the ministry that God has placed upon my heart. God is our ultimate Healer: **Jehovah-Rapha.**

Being homebound for many weeks I was not able to assemble with fellow believers. This caused me to once again reflect on the church. I offer this material to you as you consider your relationship with and to the church.

If you are part of a new company of believers, or a group that is open to change, I encourage you to prayerfully consider some of what is offered herein: "**a plea for simplicity!**"

In Christ Jesus,  
*Frederick L. Pattison*

## Dedication

I am dedicating this material to **Mike & Jeannie Amundson**. I have come to love this couple. **Mike** is “chief teacher” of an informal company of Christians<sup>1</sup> that I assemble with each Lord’s Day. He is knowledgeable in biblical languages and is an exceptional teacher of the Word. **Mike**, like myself, views and accepts the Bible as the divinely and uniquely God-breathed written Word of God. **Jeannie**, a graduate of Perdue University, ministers in her own way. She is a great complement to **Mike** in their relationship as servants of God.

Though my brother and sister may not agree with all of the premises that I share in this material I lovingly dedicate this booklet to them.

---

<sup>1</sup> Payson Bible Fellowship is a non-denominational, Bible-based, Christ-centered fellowship *without* the traditional “churchy” trappings, organization, traditions, format, etc.

## Sick, Sad, Shallow Churches Abound!

Friend, let’s face it. Our country is plagued with **churches that are sick, sad and shallow**. They can be found in nearly every community, under diverse names and labels. **No one** particular sect or denomination **can claim** to be free of them. They are **everywhere**. Some of them are large, others are made up of a handful of people. **Some** are theologically liberal, **others** are theologically conservative. **Some** are charismatic, **others** are not. Their services **may be liturgical, traditional or contemporary**. Nevertheless many, too many, **are sick, sad and shallow**.

- **Sick** – Many congregations are **dwindling** in their attendances. Entire denominations appear to be dying. Many, both local churches and entire denominations, **no longer** hold, teach and preach sound biblical doctrine. Churches are indeed sick, sick, sick!



- **Sad** – A look at the churches, especially in Europe and North America, present a dismal picture of compromise, lukewarmness, and lack of spiritual power. This picture of the overall church is portrayed by the church at Laodicea. **See – Revelation 3:14-22**,

- **Shallow** – Increasing numbers of churches, both local and entire denominations, no longer uphold and present the unchanging Gospel of Jesus Christ but present programs that are **less than biblical**. The messages (sermons) of many preachers standing in the pulpits either demean the Gospel or present a **false, fuzzy, social gospel** that indeed is **not in accord** with the historic biblical faith. Congregations are being fed “milk” rather than the solid meat of the Word needed for spiritual growth. A consistent **teaching ministry is desperately needed** in churches. **See – 1 Corinthians 3:1-3; 2 Timothy 2:15**.

Unfortunately, the New Testament model of churches appears to be rapidly falling by the wayside.

## **"The" Church!**

You may wonder "**who**" or "**what**" I mean by "**The**" Church? My **premise** is that there is **no one** denomination, sect or belief-system that is "**the**" one and only true church. Contrary to what literally millions of sincere, but misguided people believe, "**the**" Church **is not** the Roman Catholic Church. This organization, along with Eastern Orthodoxy, the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses and a host of other sects make similar claims declaring that they are "**the true**" Church. **But are they?**

As I've already indicated I **reject** all claims of any particular religious group proclaiming itself to be "**the**" one and only true church.

## Beware of these deadly words

Nearly every "religious" institution is plagued by leadership and members who refuse to budge. They, like the Pharisees of old, are bound by their religious (churchy) traditions. **The greatest opponents** to our Lord's ministry were the orthodox religious leaders of His day. In today's Christendom, much of what those religionists of yesteryear advocated, is held by ultra-fundamentalism, legalism, rigid orthodoxy, and traditionalists.



*What are these destructive words?*

***"We never did it that way before!"***

*or:*

***"We have always done it this way."***

These expressions are nearly always **tied in closely** with traditionalism. I believe that traditionalism is **a curse** when related to companies of believers. During our Lord's earthly ministry He continually **confronted** the traditions and the legalism of the religionists of His day. We are given insight into our Lord's attitude relating to tradition,

***"... you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you, 'These people honor Me with their lips; but their hearts are far from Me. They worship Me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.'" (Matthew 15:6b-9)***

Note how the apostle Paul addressed this subject,

***"See to it that no one take you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ." (Colossians 2:8)***

## **A Curse from the Reformation**

As a student of Church History I have a special affinity for the period that is known as "**the Protestant Reformation**". Though I **disagree** with some of the conclusions arrived at by the various Reformers, I



**admire** much of what they accomplished. However, there are some results, we've come to accept as the norm, that are **contrary** to biblical teaching. In this booklet I am not going into detail into these areas. However, I want to comment on an area that, I believe, is "**a curse**" as a result of the

Reformation. That curse is the **endless division** and **sectarianism**, or what we refer to as **denominationalism**, that stems from the Protestant Reformation. There are literally thousands of divisions, sects and denominations comprising what the world refers to as "**Christendom**."

Paul, **the chief-teacher** of church truth, addressed sectarianism in writing to the believers<sup>2</sup> at Corinth,

<sup>2</sup> My use of "**believer**" or "**believers**" is referring to those men and women who are **authentic followers or disciples** of Jesus Christ. They have personally believed in him and received Him as Savior and Lord. They have experienced a spiritual rebirth according to John chapter 3.



*"I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and **that there be no divisions among you**, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this One of you says, '**I follow Paul**', another, '**I follow Apollos**'; another, '**I follow Cephas**'; still another, '**I follow Christ.**'*

*"**Is Christ divided?** Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, so no one can say that you were baptized into my name. (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.) **For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel -- not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.***

*"For **the message of the cross** is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is **the power of God.**" (1 Corinthians 1:10-18)*

As we look, at what purports to be the Church, we discover that some of its many divisions are based on personalities. For instance, I wonder how many of the people attending mega-churches are **in reality followers** and disciples **of an individual** or charismatic personality?

**The Church** that goes beyond our humanly devised divisions is likened to the human body by the apostle Paul. We note this concept thusly,

*"Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For **we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body -- whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free -- and we were all given the one [Holy] Spirit, to drink. Even so that body is not made up of one part but of many.***

*"Now **you are the body of Christ, and each one is a***

*part of it." (1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 27)*

In the above exhortation **Paul** referred to this body as "**the body of Christ.**" This is a spiritual body, not an organization. No one **joins** this body. Each individual, upon being born-again, is **added** to this body **by** the Holy Spirit not by congregational vote. Believers are neither voted in or voted out of the Body of Christ as often happens in local churches.

## **Ekklesia a.k.a. Church**

An unfortunate **translation** of the word "**ekklesia**" is the word "**church.**" If the truth be known the meaning of the word "**church**" is unclear. Ask a dozen people to define the word "**church**" and you will receive numerous definitions including:

- a particular sect or denomination;
- overall Christendom;
- the Ecumenical movement;
- an organization, fraternal society of 'do-gooders';
- buildings;
- hierarchy;
- a religious spirit;
- Sacraments/ordinances.

None of the above definitions properly or Scripturally define "**Church**".

The word "**ekklesia**" was in use *before* the New Testament was written. "**ek**" = "out of," "**kaleo**" = "to call." There are a number of definitions including:

- gathering of people meeting together;
- a congregation;
- a company of "**called-out**" people, in this case the company of people who have been "**called out**" from the world and **reconciled** unto God through a personal relationship with Christ.

## What “the” Church is not

In this segment we are taking a brief look at a number of factors, as to what the Church is not:

### The Church is not a particular sect, church or denomination

Earlier I indicated that I disagree with all those sects, churches and denominations who claim that they, and they alone, are the Church. Roman Catholicism teaches that it is the Church that Jesus instituted and built. It bases its claim on what our Lord said to the apostle Peter recorded in Matthew’s Gospel. From this passage Rome teaches that their church was founded and built upon Peter. It also claims that the papacy was established at this time. This church teaches that Peter was the first pope. Succeeding popes are referred to as “the Vicars of Christ.” Biblical Christians reject this premise.

“When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say the Son of Man is?’ They replied, ‘Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ ‘But what about you?’ He asked, ‘Who do you say I am?’ Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’

“Jesus replied, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by My Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and **on this rock I will build my Church**, and the gates of death will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (Matthew 16:13-19)

The Roman claim is based on **verse 18** which reads,

“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and **on this rock I [Jesus] will build My church**, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” NKJV

**Was the Church built upon Jesus Christ or upon the apostle Peter?** This is a crucial question that **separates** Roman Catholicism from Biblical Faith. The following is a quote by Dr C.I. Scofield taken from his reference Bible:



**Matthew 16:18.** There is in the Greek a play upon the words, “**you are Peter [petros -- literally, a little rock], and upon this rock [Petra] I will build My church.**” Jesus does not

promise to build His church upon Peter, but **upon Himself**, as Peter is careful to tell us.

**See - 1 Peter 2:4-9.**



**“As you come to Him [Christ] , the living Stone -- rejected by human beings but chosen by God and precious to Him -- you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says:**

**‘See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in Him will never be put to shame.**

**‘Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,**

**‘The Stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.’ and ‘a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.’**

**They stumble because they disobey the message -- which is also what they were destined for. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.”**

## The Church is not Christendom

While in Bible College I had courses on World Religions. Through the years I have read and studied numerous books on the various religions in the world. In the past I facilitated a course on world religions at the Phoenix Bible Institute as well as at the Adult Bible School class in the local Presbyterian congregation.<sup>3</sup>

***What about Christianity? Is it simply another of the many religions of the world vying for attention?*** **Christendom** is a term used by many in referring to a world religion. Thrown into this strange mixture and conglomerate, anything and everything viewed to be "Christian," is lumped together; hence Christendom.

***The church***, as I view it from the New Testament, ***is not*** a religion. To me religion is a turn-off. **Jesus Christ and religion are separate entities.** To classify **Biblical Christianity** as Christendom is to take the position that it is simply part of the conglomerate of religious endeavors that are viewed in some way or other as Christian. **Authentic Christianity *is not* religion or "a" religion.** Authentic Christianity ***is*** **Jesus Christ** who is *"the way, and the truth, and the life."* (John 14:6)

## The Ecumenical Movement is not the Church

I view what is known as "the Ecumenical Movement", with its "ecumenism", to be largely **unbiblical**. I realize that there are varying degrees of ecumenism. My problem with ecumenism is that those involved in it nearly always **minimize** the need for Christians to hold sound biblical doctrine. It seems that the mention of the word "**doctrine**," in many Christian groups, is **anathema**. It is commonly believed, by **many advocates** of ecumenism, that doctrine is divisive. I disagree with this premise. **The word "doctrine" simply means "teaching."** It is vital that the believer have an understanding and grasp of basic biblical teaching. **See**

– Titus 2:1; 1 Timothy 4; 2 Timothy 3:1-5; 4:1-5.

Another disagreement that I have with **ecumenism** is that it **nearly always** views **any and all** religious organizations as authentic disciples of Christ. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is **only through a spiritual rebirth** that an individual becomes an bona fide Christian. **No one** is biologically born a Christian. Multitudes of people throughout the world carry the Christian label but are not born again. We need not shun using **the biblical expression** "born again" or "born anew." It is good terminology **when properly** understood and used. Unfortunately, there are many people who misuse this biblical phrase. **See – John chap. 3.**

## The Church is not the hierarchy

A few years ago most Saturday editions of the newspapers had a "**Church Page**." On the Church page there often appeared news items and ads placed there by the local churches. It always puzzled me, as to **why** on many of the ads, churches would put a **photo of "their pastor"**. *Was that individual the church?* I fear that there has developed in many churches "**a personality cult**." People attend certain churches simply because of the individual who is "**the pastor**."

With the Reformation the Reformers **recovered** the New Testament doctrine of "**the priesthood of all believers**." This is a teaching that I wholeheartedly support. **See – 1 Peter 2:4, 9-10; Rev. 1:5b-6a; Exod. 19:6.** Yet, I fear that the Reformers, probably out of fear and because of their link with the State, **did not** carry this biblical teaching far enough. The Reformers lashed out at the Roman hierarchy. Unfortunately, the Reformers and their followers instituted their **own forms of hierarchy**. In our day we have **entrenched hierarchy** in nearly every denomination. Even those local congregations, that are non-denominational and independent, often have **their own form of hierarchy**. Many who reject the papacy have in reality **their own "pope"** in the form of **the senior pastor**. A teaching exists

<sup>3</sup> Payson Community Presbyterian Church.



among some Christians known as “**pastoral authority.**” **Where is this teaching found in Scripture?** It is a form of hierarchy. It is clearly unbiblical. A Christlike pastor, **who displays servant ministry**, does not need to **demand** pastoral authority. He or she **will be** honored and respected by the people of God as they realize that the individual has been placed by God. A godly pastor **does not** dictate. **God’s people** will heed the biblical injunction relating to God-placed, God-ordained, Spirit-filled leaders. **See – Heb. 13:7, 17; 1 Timothy 4:12-16; 5:17-20.**

I am convinced that biblical churches **need to examine** their various forms of organization and **root out** whatever form of hierarchy that may be part and parcel of their church. Hierarchy **is not** the church, **is not** biblical, hence should be rejected in any and every form that it may take.

### **The Church is not a community organization , fraternal order or band of 'do-gooders'**

In some communities it is the proper thing to be part of a certain congregation. Sometimes for prestige, for business reasons, or it is the “right” church to be part of. New Testament congregations are not **organizations**. An authentic New Testament congregation is an **organism**; a spiritual body. **“The” church** that I am addressing in this booklet is the Body of Christ. It is not identified by a label, affiliation, or organization rather it is **made up** of genuine believers, men and women who have been reconciled unto God by a personal believing relationship with Jesus Christ.



### **The Church is not a building**

I do not oppose companies of believers erecting structures for greater convenience in carrying forth **the biblical concept of Christian community**. I have to admit to a special fondness for house churches. However, unlike many house church proponents, I do not believe that house churches are the only God-approved way. I do have a problem with **the entertainment centers**, with their great campuses, that are

popular today. Too much of the Lord’s money is being spent on buildings and their upkeep. **A simple structure** can prove useful as believers seek to carry out the exhortation spelled out in **Hebrews 10:23-25**,

*“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. **And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.**”*

### **The religious spirit is not the Church**

I am convinced that one of the greatest enemies of Christianity is **“the religious spirit.”** The Pharisees of our Lord’s day had such a spirit. They were religious. They were faithful to their local synagogues. They were steeped and bound by rigid legalism and traditionalism.

*I wonder how many people in churches have a religious spirit.* Religion and authentic biblical faith **are not** the same. **Religion** is the vain and futile attempt of human beings to reach and appease God or “a god”. **Biblical faith** is in complete opposition to **“the religious spirit”**. Biblical faith **is not** religion it is **God reaching** out to humankind. Our Lord continually **confronted “the religious spirit.”** **See – Matt. chap. 23; Matt. 7:13-23.**

**“The religious spirit”** is that which the apostle Paul addressed to young preacher Timothy speaking of conditions that would exist in the Church during End Times,

*“But mark this: **There will be terrible times in the last days.** People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God -- **having a form of godliness but denying its power.** Have nothing to do with such people.” (2 Timothy 3:1-5)*

## Sacraments/Ordinances do not make the church, church

Many people believe that what counts with God is that they be baptized and take communion. Many people are baptized, either as infants or as adults, believing that this **will or has** saved them. Others believe receiving the bread and wine of communion gives them eternal life. **Neither** baptism nor communion imparts salvation. Religious acts, religious deeds and doing good works **do not** bring eternal life. **Good works** should be part of the believer's life **after, not before** their spiritual rebirth. **See - Ephesians 2:10; Book of James.**

**Salvation**, according to the New Testament, is entirely of God. We call it **grace**. Note what the Word of God has to say regarding eternal life, i.e., *salvation*,

*"For it is **by grace you have been** saved **through faith** – and this is not from yourselves, it is **the gift of God** – not by works, so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9)*

*"If you **declare** with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and **believe** in your heart that God raised him from the dead, **you will be saved**. For it is **with your heart** that you **believe and are justified**, and it is **with your mouth** that you **profess your faith and are saved**. As Scripture says, 'Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.' For there is **no difference** between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for **Every-one who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.**" (Romans 10:9-13)*

*"What must I do to be saved? . . . **Believe** in the Lord Jesus, and you will be save . . ." (Acts 16:31)*

*"Therefore, **since we have been justified through faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand . . ." (Romans 5:1-2a)*

## The Church is not American or political

In our American love for God and country it often appears that many Christians **have difficulty in separating**



the two. The church of Jesus Christ **should avoid** fostering a nationalistic spirit that can be misunderstood and used by ungodly political leaders. Church and country **are two separate and distinct entities**. It must be recognized that within the Body of Christ there is **room for differences** of political views and allegiance. In reality Christians, whether American, British, German, African, Chinese, or whoever are first and foremost citizens of a kingdom that is not of this world. **See – John 18:36; Ephesians 2:14-22; Philippians 3:20; 1 Cor. 15:20-28; 2 Peter 1:10-11.**

## What "the" Church is

I am not anti-church. I love **"the" Church**. My differences are not with the biblical premise of the Church. Though I do not claim to have all of the answers relating to **"the" Church** it is my desire to share with others what I believe Scripture teaches. History reveals that it was very early that **compromise and error** began **creeping** into the churches. I recommend reading the works of **"the Church Fathers"**. Always keep in mind that **these individuals** were subject to their own opinions and **were not** divinely inspired, by the Holy Spirit, in their beliefs and writings. We can learn from their writings, yet we must **use caution**, in what we accept as biblical. Be sure that what you read is in **accord** with Scripture.

The church is two-fold:

1. it is **local companies of believers** who are geographically located. **See – 1 Cor. 1:2; 16:19; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1b; Phil. 1:1b; Col. 1:1b; 1 & 2 Thess. 1:1b; Rev. 2 & 3; Rom. 16; etc.**



2. in total it is **the corporate Body of Christ** consisting of all authentic disciples of Jesus Christ. See – Gal. 1:13; 1 Cor. 12:12-14, 27-28; Rom. 12:4-6a; Eph. 2:19-22, etc.



As indicated earlier I take exception with those church groups **who claim** that in addition to the Bible, tradition and their church are equal in authority in matters relating to faith and practice. As a Biblical Christian I **accept one final authority** in matters relating to faith and practice: **the Holy Scriptures**. I accept, teach and believe that the Bible and **the Bible alone** is **the believer's sole authority** in these matters; **not** the church **nor** tradition **nor** hierarchy. The institutional Church has **erred** and continues to err time and again. **Tradition is unreliable. Hierarchy is fallible.** But **the Bible**, as the divinely and uniquely inspired written Word of God, is **infallible**. The Bible does not just **contain** the Word of God; **it is** the written Word of God.

I'm sure that by now you realize that I **am not a theological liberal** who questions or casts aspirations upon and/or doubts the validity of Scripture. I am of the belief that the Bible is largely to be taken literally. However, this does not dismiss reason. Without doubt there are some things in Scripture that were never meant to be taken literally by the original writers and the Holy Spirit. **The ultimate author** of Scripture was the Holy Spirit. We note what the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy,

*"... how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. **All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting training in righteousness, so that all God's people may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.**" (2 Timothy 3:15b-16)*

Note how the apostle Peter put it in the following passage,

*"For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke **as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.**" (2 Peter 1:21) NKJV*

It is through Scripture that God's plan and way of salvation is revealed,

*"**So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.**" (Romans 10:17) NKJV*

*"Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But **these are written** that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that **by believing** you may have life in His name." (John 20:30-31)*

### The Canon of Scripture

The word "**canon**" in this case means: "**rule.**" It refers to the standard, used in determining which writings were **God-breathed**. These writings are what have been **included** in what we know as the Bible. Today many other writings and books are being promoted as books that were not included in the canon but should have been included. This is where I draw the line. I believe that **the sixty-six books**, included in our Protestant Bible, are there by action of the Holy Spirit who **guided** in determining what was to be included in the canon of Scripture and what was not to be included.

**Does this mean that the institutional Church is responsible for compiling the Bible?** Personally I think not. I **reject** the Roman Catholic **claim** that it was their church that established Scripture, consequently claiming that their church was before Scripture. *What about the Old Testament that the early churches had and used? **The Holy Spirit** has determined what is and what is not divinely inspired Scripture,*

*"**Your word, LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens.**" (Psalm 119:89)*

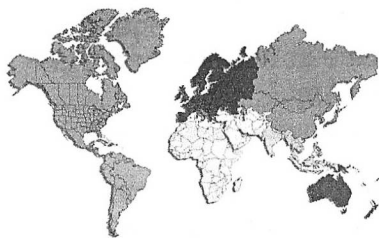
**"Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day spoke to them and continued his message until midnight." (Acts 20:7) NKJV**

A biblical company of God's people can and should provide spiritual oversight and lovingly administer discipline when necessary. This is to honor the Lord. **See – Matt. 18:15-17; Gal. 1:6-9; 2 Cor. 13:1-10.** Within the local assembly there is also a place for pastoral oversight, **but not** pastoral control. **See – 1 Peter 5:1-3.**

In addition to the above it is vital that the company of believers, in each given area be faithful in sharing the Gospel. **Biblical evangelism is vital** to the spiritual health and growth of the assembly. Without reaching out to others the believers are violating **the explicit command** of our Lord. The apostle Paul knew and wrote of obeying this command,

**"I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek." (Rom. 1:14-16) NKJV**

Just prior to our Lord leaving this planet, to return to the Father, Jesus left these instructions which continue to be in force today,



**"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me [Jesus]. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey every-**

**thing I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)**

## Organization or Organism?

Earlier I mentioned that the church of our Lord **is not** an organization but **is** an organism; a spiritual body. Many churches today get bogged down by **endless structure**. In many churches there is a committee for nearly everything. In some churches there are **endless business meetings** that too often create **division and hard-feelings**. When we allow **Christ** to be **the head** of each church, we begin to relax. **The call for simplicity** is desperately needed in this busy society in which we find ourselves living.

Churches began going astray shortly after the death of the original apostles. With the crowning of **Constantine** as emperor of the Roman Empire and the toleration of Christianity, **Christendom** came into being. It nearly submerged the believing Body of Christ. Our Lord exhorted and warned while He was ministering on earth,

**"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.**

**"Watch out for false prophets [preachers]. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them." (Matthew 7:13-16)."**

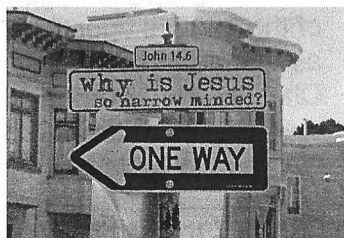


**Not everyone** who professes to be a Christian is one. **Not everyone** who is a member of a church or denomination knows Christ. **Not everyone** who talks the talk knows what it is all about. It is more than head knowledge. **Only those** who have repented of sin and come into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ are authentic believers. As our Lord taught **"it is by their fruit that you will know them."**

**How about you?** Do people know that you are a disciple of Jesus Christ by the life you live? Have you opened your heart and life allowing Jesus to come and live in you? Remember Jesus said, "**I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.**" (John 14:6)

Contrary to what many people believe there are not many roads or paths to God. Jesus Christ is "**the Way!**" Religion **does not** lead to God. The Holy Spirit alone brings lost individuals to God in and through personally knowing and accepting Jesus Christ.

"Salvation is found in **no one else**, for there is **no other name [Jesus]** given under heaven by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)



If you are receiving Jesus Christ into your life we would like to hear from you.

This ministry is non-denominational, Bible-based and Christ-centered. We offer literature on many varied subjects. A small companion booklet to this material is titled:

***"Dead & Dying Churches"***

You may request a copy of this booklet and/or a listing of available literature by contacting:

**Olive Tree Ministries**

**a.k.a. Strawberry Views**

**"Unique – Challenging – Controversial!"**



**HC 1, Box 1529**

**Strawberry, AZ 85544**

Email – [olivetreeministries@gmail.com](mailto:olivetreeministries@gmail.com)

Visit – [www.strawberryviews.com](http://www.strawberryviews.com)