

Who is the Church?

(Sermon Notes) By Warren Zehrung – 11/9/2013

Brethren, **you** are the Church! Too many of our people do not understand the concept of "Church." On the entire face of the earth, Jesus Christ has only **one** Church – the Church of God.

One of the first things we learned when we were being called was that the Church of God was not to be found by looking for those buildings with steeples and a cross on top. Is it the place where believers gather to worship? We learned, "The church is not a building."

The question became then, not, **what** is the church, but "**Who is the Church?**" Today, there are many substitutes masked as God's True Church. It behooves us to be extremely careful when we are looking for the Church Jesus established. Who is the church?

Is the church, **the people** – the believers who follow the lead of God's Holy Spirit? Yes! Most of us have been in the Church for decades – and we feel that we have a pretty good idea of what constitutes the Church.

Jesus said that in these last perilous days the Church would go off course. With that in mind it is good that we look into the word of God and understand "Church" from God's perspective. And so we ask this question: **Who is the Church?**

What can we know about this True Church? What does the Bible reveal about it? Where is it? **Who** is it?

Is one church denomination or organization as good as another? What is the purpose of the Church? When was the Church founded, and how long will it last? Can the Church be joined?

Do we know **who** the Church of God is? How we understand and perceive "**the Church**" is quite important in determining how we live our faith.

The Church is not prepared to meet Jesus Christ at His return. This must be addressed by the Church. One reason that the Church is not prepared is because the bigger offshoots of the Worldwide Church of God – their headquarters desire no association with any of the other groups who have **the same** foundational beliefs.

Even though they used to keep the **Sabbath** together, attend the **Feasts** together, and follow the **same** basic doctrinal principles shared by other Christian churches, they now choose **not** to reconcile with one another.

There is absolutely no Biblical justification for these corporate organizations to keep God's people separated from each other.

Each one of the Worldwide Church of God corporate organizational offshoots incorrectly claims to be "**The Church.**" Brethren, that is not proper.

Individual ministers still refer to their various organizations as "The Church." More specifically they teach that their **church** is one and the same as their **headquarters** or their **home office**.

They say, "Let me check with **the church,**" as they dial up their headquarters. When they want to add authority to a statement they say: "I checked with the Cincinnati home office." "Let me check with church headquarters at Charlotte." "Let me check with the men at Allen, Texas." And brethren, I do not mean to single out only a few – this fictitious belief that the **organization is the church** is endemic in the groups. It's in Akron, Edmond and all over the place.

Some of the leaders of these groups actually believe that they **personally** are the embodiment of the church. They say, "If you want to check with the church you check with me!"

I was speaking with a man last night who told me that one of these church leaders said to him that if you leave me – you've left the church.

Some brethren believe that "Church" is about finding the key to the Place of Safety or recognizing the man who promises to get you there. There are church leaders who try to be in control of every aspect of the brethren's lives – that is not right. "Church," is not about finding the right corporate organization, or one that is comfortable.

There are some good speakers in organizations – but why aren't they standing up to their hierarchy when it is taking them off track?

Where is the Church Jesus Christ founded, and who is the head of it? Jesus alone is the head of the Church. Who is the True Church of God?

Brethren, according to the Biblical definition of "church," **you** are the Church – not some headquarters of a political corporate organization.

No **man** has dominion over an individual's faith because every converted person must work out his own salvation with fear and trembling.

Philippians 2:

12 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

2 Corinthians 1:

24 Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand.

Brethren, have we grown to the point where we are able to discern right from wrong according to God's Word – and refuse to be manipulated by those would control us for corporate gain?

2 John 1:

7 For many deceivers are entered into the world...

2 Timothy 3:

13 But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.

Acts 20:

28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

29 For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

30 Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

Controlling ministers do not like for you to ask tough questions or point out the reality of a situation that is not Biblically based.

Here is what is taking place: In changing the Scriptural definition of the Church to mean a specific organization, these leaders are relegating the members to an insignificant, unimportant, and improper status.

The Church is a **spiritual entity** in God's sight. Let me repeat that: The true Church of God is not a denomination or a corporate organization, but a **spiritual entity**. We will see right here that a **spiritual entity** is more real than a physical organization.

You and me and all the faithful brethren – **we** are the Church in God's sight.

We Church brethren have duties, obligations and responsibilities that are not to be **palmed off** to others.

No one's headquarters is a spiritual entity standing between you and God. Make no mistake about it; according to the Bible, the **brethren** are "the Church."

The Bible is perfectly clear; the **purpose** of the ministry is to **serve the members** – not to champion the corporate organization. Not to promote the corporate organization. Not to support the organization rather than the membership.

There are **not** going to be **any** political corporate organizations separating the saints in the Kingdom of God.

The true Church is the **collective body of individuals**, called out from the ways of this present evil world, who have totally surrendered themselves to the rule of God, and who, through the Holy Spirit become the begotten Children of God.

Romans 8:

9 You are not in the flesh, **but in the Spirit**, if so be that the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.

Brethren, we are the Church! The Spirit of God dwells in each of us individually. We are built up to be a **spiritual** house:

1 Peter 2:

5 Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

No headquarters can offer up spiritual sacrifices! Headquarters can pay the bills and furnish the halls because of their bookkeeping functionality. But, they do not intercede to God for us.

The Church is not an earthly structure, nor a man formed organization. The Church is: the **people** of God. The Church people are you and I because we are Christians that are led by God's Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:

14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, **they** are the Children of God.

Every one of the political corporate organizational offshoots, when put on the spot, will grudgingly give lip service to the fact that there are "**other brethren**" out there some place – but they will steadfastly maintain that theirs is the controlling organization – the church with the authority – with an attitude of superiority – to the exclusion of all the other brethren.

Brethren, do we realize; will we admit, that God's people are scattered all over the countryside? No one knows where they all are – except for God.

Some of the church leaders are reluctant to think about the scattered brethren because they are too busy with revisionist history – telling now how they stood for the truth when the Tkaches were changing our beliefs.

In actual fact, some of the leaders were instrumental in disfellowshipping, firing and putting-out the faithful, believing, true saints who were standing tall for God's Truth. Those harsh ministers only left their secure berth at Worldwide when their jobs were assured within the new organizations.

Do we stop and think about how very close we are to the return of Jesus Christ? We are in Laodicean times – when the predominant attitude of the Church is one of lethargy and sluggishness.

We once brought the Gospel to all the world in a great way – our hearts were in the effort – but not now. Jesus says to us:

Revelation 3:

19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be **zealous** therefore, and **repent**.

God tells us to get zealous – because He knows that we are not zealous – as we should be. Yes – we need to cry out to this world to repent – but let us not forget that God is also telling us – that we too must repent.

One of the things that we need to repent of is the thinking that it is someone else's responsibility to **preach** the Gospel and be a **witness** to the world. Do not for one moment think that it takes a large organization to fulfill this commission.

Let me show it to you in the Scriptures. The Church – you and me and all the faithful brethren – **we** must repent and be on fire for God's truth. There are no fires at any of the Headquarters.

Sure, everyone wants to belong to a nice large group and feel accepted, but isn't it far better to be accepted by God than to be accepted by man. God says that those of the Laodicean era are still His people, – God's Church – but dangerously astray.

Luke 12:

32 Fear not, **little flock**; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

God's true Church is **small** – always has been – always will be.

It is **not** our job to grow the church at the expense of doctrine and truth.

Some new brethren will be called in the last hour, and the Gospel will not have gone to all the cities of Israel before Christ returns.

Matthew 20:

8 So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the laborers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.

Those called at the last hour received a full payment.

Matthew 10:

23 When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come."

God's Work reaches nations, leaders and individuals as God chooses.

Matthew 24:

14 This Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come."

We find here God's definition of "The Work" that we ascribe to:

John 6:

29 Jesus answered and said unto them, This is **THE WORK OF GOD**, that ye believe on Him [Jesus Christ] whom He [the Father] hath sent.

The work of God **transcends organizations** and individuals, and yet **our** personal conduct and faith are a part of that great witness to the world. Why else would Jesus say to us:

John 17:

19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.

God's truth and doctrine set us apart from the world. Jesus was praying for **us**, brethren, in His time of anguish.

John 17:

20 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;

Jesus is saying here that individually – each of us in the Church – that our Christian conduct should be a witness to the world.

John 17:

23 I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and **THAT THE WORLD MAY KNOW** that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

That's a lot of love that God has for us – so much so that our lives witness to the world of the Work of God. I conclude from these verses that each of **our lives** has a big part to play in the Work of God.

Why are so many within God's Church displaying **spiritual blindness** to what's really going on. It is because we erroneously think that we have it all – All the truth, all the doctrine, all the booklets – we're sitting pretty!

Revelation 3:

17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and know not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and **blind**, and naked:

18 I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou may be rich; and white raiment, that thou may be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye salve, that thou may see.

Too many corporate ministers are **dumbing down** God's people – but shame on us for allowing it to happen.

Revelation 3:

20 Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

Brethren, do we possess the zeal for the truth of God that we should be displaying? Are we – by the lives we live – witnessing to others? Are we calling on everyone who can hear the "witness" messages to "Repent" and turn to God?

Are we helping one another to prepare for the very difficult times that are just ahead of us and prepare for the return of Jesus Christ? Are we praying for discernment and the wisdom to follow where Jesus Christ is leading?

How many of the brethren are primarily concerned with where this world is rapidly heading? How many brethren engage in spiritual conversations at the conclusion of Sabbath services?

These are functions of the Church. These are the things you and I must be laying our lives down for. If your minister is off base – give him a good talking to. Being our brother's keeper means that we are continuously provoking one another to good works to be in the Kingdom of God.

That includes your local minister who preaches good sermons while doing his best to stay under his headquarters' radar. You may be compelled to tell him that you won't put up with it any more – and walk out the door.

You wouldn't be leaving the Church – as he'd try to say. You'd be properly representing the Church that Jesus established. Let's keep these things straight in our minds.

What you see going on in the major churches of God today – will not be going on in the Kingdom of God. Those who support corporate extremism do not represent the true Church of God.

Opening up the hall doors to the world and telling the brethren not to offend them with words like "the doctrine of Jesus Christ" or "The Feasts of the Lord" is not the way to let your light shine.

Brethren, we need to stand tall in this dark world.

We are not yet prepared for the return of Jesus Christ – and that should scare the socks off us. It should shock us into action. Jesus introduced His disciples to the concept of "**Church**."

Matthew 16:

- 13** When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?
- 14** And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.
- 15** He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?
- 16** And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the **Messiah** / Christ, the Son of the living God.
- 17** And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

God the Father opened Peter's mind to see that Jesus was the fulfillment of the prophecies concerning the Messiah that God promised to send. Brethren – are our minds opened to the reality that Jesus – the Messiah – is just about ready to return to a select few believers?

This revelation of Peter's – that Jesus was indeed the Messiah – was the **foundational principle** upon which Jesus would begin establishing an assembly of true believers.

Matthew 16:

- 18** And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock **I will build my church**; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Jesus was referring to Peter's assertion: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." That profession of faith is the foundation rock upon which Jesus' Church is built.

I will build my church – is a big concept encompassing the fact that even though we are all slated for death – somehow, Jesus would remove that death sentence – reconcile an assembly of folks to the Father – and gain entry into the Kingdom of God for that gathering of people.

I will build my church – had nothing what so ever to do – with establishing various political corporate organizations to rule over the brethren.

Peter correctly identified Jesus as being the prophesied Messiah. Jesus did not say churches – but church! The New Testament Church of God came into being on the day of Pentecost following the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Some brethren were called by the Father and became Children of God on that day. We would say that they became "Church members." God's Spirit was poured out on them for a very special purpose – the establishment of the Church. There were no buildings, and no organizations – only people who had received the gift of God's Holy Spirit.

The Church of God is the **Spiritual** Body of Jesus Christ. The Church is made up of those brethren who have been called out of the world by God the Father into the Body of Christ. The Church is made up of those saints who endeavor to keep God's Commandments in the same way, and to the same extent that Jesus did.

The people of the world are not being called at this time. Only a select few people who are given spiritual gifts that are needed for the purposes of God's Will are being called by God at this time. It is they who will reign and rule with Jesus Christ in the world tomorrow.

All the brethren who are in the Church of God are the "Body of Christ." Only those people whom God the Father draws out of the world, can by repentance, faith in Jesus Christ (as our personal Savior), baptism (through submersion under water), the receiving of the Holy Spirit (by the laying on of hands), become part of **the Church**.

Jesus Christ established the Church for the purpose of training up and qualifying a people with **spiritual** knowledge and Godly **character** to reign and rule with Him in the Millennium.

Brethren, we are not being given the luxury of being wall flowers.

Matthew 5:

14 Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

15 Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it gives light unto all that are in the house.

So, after giving us that explanation – Jesus gives us a decree:

Matthew 5:

16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Ask yourselves brethren, “Does my life glorify our Father in heaven as it should in these troubling times?” What is the Church to teach? How are we to let our light shine? The answer to these two questions is encompassed by the total life of Christ.

What kind of a man was Jesus? What did He do? How did He live His life? What kind of relationship did He have with His Father in heaven? The answer to those questions is what the Church of God teaches, and that is how the Church is to live.

Matthew 28:

20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”

One purpose for God's True Church is to prepare those who are willing to live God's way of righteousness and self-control. These verses do not apply to the world at large.

It is only those comparative few – God’s Church – who will be the Bride of Christ.

Revelation 19:

7 Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and **his wife hath made herself ready.**

8 And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

9 And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.

Christ’s wife – the Church – has **made herself ready.**

Brethren, this is telling us that we have to **ready ourselves** – do not look to any organization to get you ready for the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Revelation 19:

7 ...for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and **his wife hath made herself ready.**

That is our first responsibility. Do not wait for **someone else** to get you ready. The responsibility and duty of Church brethren is to function as God's tools in helping to eventually bring salvation to humanity, and to demonstrate God's wisdom to His spiritual creation, and ultimately to be in the Kingdom of God. Some believe that if they get prophecy right they will have it made. Some believe it is all about food, or how a person dresses.

Romans 14:

17 The Kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit."

Jesus Christ founded His Church for the purpose of providing a nurturing home in which Christians would be able to develop.

Ephesians 4:

13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

The Church gathering and knowledge of one another provides the opportunity wherein we are able to, "...consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works." (Hebrews 10:24)

Jesus says that those in the Church are His brothers and sisters. Did you ever notice how much brothers and sisters look just like one another with a family resemblance?

Romans 8:

29 For whom He [God the Father] did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He [Jesus Christ] might be the firstborn among many [brothers and sisters].

If we are a part of the True Church that Jesus is the head of, we know that God cares how much each of us loves the brethren – and that we lay our lives down for the brethren just AS Jesus laid His life down for us. That is an absolute requirement for the Church.

We can have all the knowledge in the world, but if we do not have love of the brethren, we have nothing (1 Corinthians 13:2).

Jesus Christ died because He loved us first, and now it is our turn to do as Jesus Christ – our ultimate example – did, and love one another according to the Ten Commandments.

Be Strong and be Courageous. It is difficult right now brethren – but here is our hope:

There awaits us the better resurrection – the great resurrection where we will be changed into members of the glorious Family of God.

End: Who is the Church?