

## Why I “Left the Church” to Find Jesus Christ

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Of course, you’re wondering, *What do you mean you “left the church” to find Jesus Christ?* Let me explain...

Like me, many Christians—whether they attend a church, fellowship or study group—have come to the conclusion that certain things take place in their meetings that have *nothing* to do with Jesus’ actual teachings. Many have become disillusioned and given up on “church.” As one man told me, “I needed a break from religion. If God wants me back He will let me know.” And when you think about it, with a church on nearly every corner, is it any wonder people are confused, disappointed and asking, *Where is God, really? Is there such a thing as absolute truth? If so, where can I find the truth?*

At one time, I was part of a church organization that thought they *alone* had the “whole truth.” This is nothing new, since most churches scattered throughout this nation and around the world make similar claims. But I came to see the hypocrisy, nepotism, and control in the hierarchical system that I was a part of. In many ways it was very similar to the religious environment of Christ’s time. Of the scribes and Pharisees, the religious leaders of His day, Jesus said, “Hypocrites! Isaiah has prophesied well concerning you, saying, ‘This people draw near to Me with their mouths, and with their lips they honor Me; but their hearts are far away from Me. But they worship Me in vain, teaching *for* doctrine *the* commandments of men’ ” (Matt. 15: 7-9).

*This* was my church—saying all the “right” things, but plagued by corruption, abuse, vanity, and an obsession with human traditions.

Eventually, I came out of that system. I left that “church”—but not the *spiritual church*, the body of Christ. Like many others, I was warned that I was leaving the “true church”—and would lose my salvation. Sound familiar? Such fear mongering is *common* to many churches around the world. Interestingly, Satan is the “god of this world” (II Cor. 4:4), and *he* is the author of confusion and fear.

### What is Truth?

Pilate asked this of the Christ: “What is truth?” (John 18:38). As this passage shows, confusion about *truth* is not a new thing. But there is a place you can go for *the truth*—it is called the Bible, the Word of God. Unfortunately, most people—even “Christians”—do not read it. *That* is the problem. People typically want *someone else* (pastors and ministers) to tell them what the Bible says—to tell them what God expects.

John 17:17 says, “Your Word is the truth.” *God’s Word* is truth. Jesus says, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). If there is no God, if His Word is not the truth, then we might as well eat, drink, and be merry—and do whatever we want until we die (I Cor. 15:32). Do you believe in God? You’d better—for even the demons believe and fear (James 2:19).

**God is the source of truth:** Deuteronomy 32:4 says, “*He is the Rock; His work is perfect for all His ways are just, a God of faithfulness [truth], and without iniquity; just and upright is He.*” John 1:14 says, “And the Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us (and we ourselves beheld His glory, *the glory as of the only begotten with the Father*), full of grace and **truth.**”

**Satan is the source of falsehood:** John 8:44 says, “You are of *your* father the devil, and the

lusts of your father you desire to practice. He was a murderer from *the* beginning, and **has not stood in the truth because there is no truth in him**. Whenever he speaks a lie, he is speaking from his own *self*; for **he is a liar, and the father of it.**”

Truth comes from God; falsehood comes from the devil. Do men lie? Of course! Man inherited a deceitful spirit from Satan. Once man chose that path in the Garden of Eden, he’s been subject to deceit and false teaching ever since. Isaiah 59:4 says, “None calls for justice, nor does anyone plead for truth; they trust in vanity and speak lies. They conceive mischief and bring forth iniquity.” We can all see the evidence—corruption and deceit permeate every part of society: law, commerce, education, government, religion. Yes, false teachings all too easily find their way into churches.

Whatever false teachings exist in churches, they did not originate from God. *Truth* comes from God; truth is part of the nature of God, for He cannot and will not lie (Titus 1:1-2). Again, lying and deceit come from Satan the devil (John 8:44)—and from misguided men under his sway.

For over 40 years I have read and studied the Word of God. I read it every day and I am still learning. After all, we are to grow in grace and spiritual knowledge (II Peter 3:18). Through reading the Bible—and believing what it says, as opposed to what men want me to believe—I began to see the corruption, hypocrisy and carnality of the leaders of my former church. Through God’s Word, I was led to *leave* that organization. And, sadly, almost all church organizations are similarly plagued. Thus, I knew I had to “leave the church” to find a real relationship with Jesus Christ.

### **What is the Church?**

Jesus Christ said, “I will build My church!” (Matt. 16:18). The Greek word for *church* throughout the New Testament is *ekklesia*, which means “called out ones.” Strong’s Concordance defines “church” as: a calling out, meeting, religious congregation, Jewish Synagogue, or church community of members, or assembly. Nelson’s *New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* has this to say: “Church: a local assembly of believers as well as the redeemed of all the ages who follow Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.”

The word *ekklesia* is used 115 times in the New Testament—mostly in the book of Acts, the writings of the apostle Paul, and the general epistles. At least 92 times the word refers to a *local congregation*. The other references are to the “church” in general—to all believers of all ages.

Unfortunately, many look at the church as a building or an organization. They fail to realize that, according to the Scriptures, the *true* church is God’s flock—it’s the people. It is a *spiritual* entity—not a physical organization or corporation. It is the spiritual *body* of Christ (I Cor. 12:12, 27; Eph. 1:22-23).

The church is made up of those who have been personally *called out* of this world by God (John 6:44). They come from all nations and walks of life, from other religions and beliefs. Removing the veil of blindness (Isa. 25:7; II Cor. 3:15-16), God alone leads them to His truth, which is pure and unadulterated, so that they might live a new life through Christ. Collectively, they are the *ekklesia*.

But all too often—as in my former association—the physical “church” becomes corrupt; various forms of abuse take place; men take to themselves too much authority and “lord it over” the members; and biblical teachings get replaced by tradition. In fact, tradition is a *big* part of most religions. But as Peter wrote, we are to “be holy” as God is holy (I Pet. 1:15-16). This means we must reject tradition if it is in conflict with the truth of the Scriptures.

When *tradition* is set over truth, what must we do? Do we follow tradition, or do we follow

truth? A true Christian must choose truth. This was the very situation I faced.

I chose to leave that “church.” But I was *not* leaving the spiritual church, the body of Christ. There is a profound difference! Jesus also said the “gates of hell”—meaning the grave—would not prevail against His true *ekklesia* (Matt. 16:18). In other words, the true church would never die out, because Christ is alive, sitting at the “right hand of God the Father,” and is continually working with His true, spiritual church—of which He is the Head and Chief Corner Stone (Eph. 1:22; 2:20; 5:23; Col. 1:18; I Pet. 2:7). And only *God* knows who truly belong to Him!

The apostle Paul had great zeal for his Pharisaic beliefs, even to the point of orchestrating persecution against the true church (Phil. 3:6). How many of us have had the same mindset—that our church was the “only one” and that we alone had a corner market on the “truth”? Like Paul, we too need to have a “Damascus road experience”—to get knocked down spiritually so we can begin to let Christ *really* teach us through His Word and through God’s Holy Spirit. Only then can we begin to *unlearn* previous teachings that were nothing but doctrines and commandments of men.

We are to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the *truth*. If we sincerely desire the truth, and have an attitude of love and respect toward God, then He will see to it that we are properly taught. Indeed, as John himself felt, there is no greater joy for God than to know that His begotten children are walking in the truth (III John 4).

### **Church Structure was a Key Problem**

One of the primary problems in my former association was the structure of the “church organization.” Like many churches, we had a strictly *hierarchal structure* set up much like the military—complete with titles, ranks, and pay grades. This system almost always leads to the consolidation of power for only a few, various forms of abuse, deep corruption, and wastefulness. Power and control are its watchwords.

But there *does* need to be structure in the body of Christ. We are admonished by Paul that all things should be done decently and in order (I Cor.14:40)—which requires organization and a “structure” of responsibilities. Without structure, confusion and discord will take place. But when men—who have organized themselves into a corporate structure—want to control you, beware! They are not looking out for your best interest, but are lusting for money, power, and prestige. Anyone who is ordained to an “office” for serving God’s flock should take their responsibility very seriously—for God is watching!

How is the true *ekklesia* to be structured or organized? First, know that Christ Himself has set up the structure for His church. No man can take this right to himself. God the Father is Christ’s head, and Jesus is head of every man (I Cor. 11:3). As we have seen, Christ is the Head of His church. Moreover, He has built or designed His church on the spiritual foundation of the apostles and prophets—with Himself as the Chief Corner Stone: “You are being built up on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being *the* chief Cornerstone in Whom all the building, being conjointly fitted together, is increasing into a holy temple in *the* Lord; in Whom you also are being built together for a habitation of God in *the* Spirit” (Eph. 2:20).

We then are *living stones* which make up the building (I Pet. 2:5). As members of His body, we are to grow and overcome following our conversion; we are to strive to learn to live by every word of God. This means we are changing our way of thinking by and through the help of God’s Holy Spirit. Still, we need the help of the church to fully grow to spiritual maturity. Thus, Christ has placed men, as His servants, in specific “offices” to help us in our journey toward eternal life in His kingdom.

What are those offices, and how should they be used? Notice Ephesians 4:

“And He [Christ] gave some as apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers **for the perfecting of the saints**, for *the* work of *the* ministry [service], **for the edifying of the body of Christ**; until we all come into 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” (verses 11-13).

Let’s look at these offices and see what they mean.

**Apostle**—An ambassador of the gospel; officially a commissioner of Christ with miraculous powers; messenger; he that is sent.

**Prophet**—One who foretells future events; inspired speaker.

**Evangelist**—Preacher of the gospel.

**Pastor and Teacher**—Instructor; doctor; master; teacher.

Every one of these “offices” or positions are for *one purpose only*—the perfecting of the saints and the edifying of the body of Christ! As this passage shows, whatever office one holds in the church (including that of elder) that person has been called to “minister” or serve the flock—to help, teach, encourage, and, when necessary, give gentle correction. Why? So that the body of Christ might grow in grace and knowledge in their journey toward perfection as sons and daughters in the Kingdom of God.

Every servant of God should read Matthew 18:6 and tremble: “But whoever shall cause one of these little ones who believe in Me to offend [cause to stumble spiritually], it would be better for him that a millstone be hung around his neck and he be sunk in the depths of the sea.”

True ministers of Christ—indeed, the entire structure of the ministry—never seek to have *dominion* over one’s faith, but are called to be “helpers” of the believer’s joy (II Cor. 1:24).

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God called me *out* of the “church” I was part of for many years. Today, I understand that the true Church of God is the spiritual body of Christ. And no man can put me out of that body. I also now see that all true followers of Christ are being molded and fashioned in Jesus’ image. We are like the stones of Solomon’s Temple being prepared “off site” (I Kings 6:7)—waiting to be fitted together or assembled by Christ at His return.

The *true church* is wherever two or more are gathered in Jesus’ name—in a humble spirit of seeking the *truth*. For those thus gathered, *He is with them* (Matt. 18:20).

May Christ, the living and active Head of His Church, continue to lead us all in grace, knowledge and peace.