

What is the Church?

Happy Sabbath to all.

This week, I want to ask a very simple question, “What is the Church?” And I want to answer it in a very simple way; actually, I want to answer it in several very simple ways, all of which are relevant to our complete and advancing understanding of truth.

The reason why there are several answers to this question is because the Church is a creation of Yah. The things that our Father creates are beautiful, complex, and always reveal something about His nature to the on-looking universe. In asking someone what the Church is, we are really asking, “What is the picture of Yahweh that you have? What kind of Creator is He, that He should make such a thing?”

I would like to begin tonight by demonstrating something that I believe will underline the importance of this study for those who hear it. There is a pair of passages that are sometimes taken to mean opposite things, but what I will start with is revealing that these two statements of Yahshua are actually perfectly harmonious, and indeed very relevant to questions like the one we are asking tonight.

The first passage is this: “And John answered Him, saying, ‘Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us, and we forbad him, because he followeth not us.’

“But Yahshua said, ‘Forbid him not, for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is on our part. For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward.’” (Mark 9:38-41)

The second is this one, repeated in two different Gospels: “He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.” (Mat 12:30, Luke 11:23)

At first glance, these two incidents might seem to be portraying conflicting messages. However, they are addressing two different types of circumstances, and instructing two different kinds of reactions. In the first event, others were preaching in the name of Christ, and Yahshua instructs His followers to leave them alone, and not to interfere with the work of those individuals. He does not say anything in judgment about the individuals themselves, whether they are converted or not, only that the work they are doing is currently valuable.

Those individuals were not opposing the Savior or His ministry, and in fact we know very little about the motives of these non-following evangelists.

In the second incident, Yahshua is speaking to those who have specifically been perceived by the people as religious authorities, and they were actively seeking to discredit the Messiah by saying that He was casting out devils by means of demonic power, and therefore not to be trusted.

In such a case, there was direct opposition, and the testimony that the Son of Yah bore came forth against this false witness. The ones that Yahshua was addressing in this second circumstance had already come to a firm conclusion about Him, and He in response sent a rebuke in their direction.

The reason why I bring this up is because the first passage, in which Yahshua directs His followers to leave others alone in their ministry even though they were not followers, can be taken as a justification for the ecumenical movement, in which doctrines and foundational teachings are thrown out the door. As long as an individual can subscribe to a few poorly-defined, often artificial, statements, that individual is accepted into fellowship, and no attempt is made to ensure his continued growth and sanctification.

There are a few things to keep in mind when attempting to rightly apply those passages. In the first place, while Yahshua was still performing His earthly ministry, there was no defined "Church." There were no false Christian doctrines, no pagan intrusion into the teachings of the Messiah, and nothing even approaching the apostasy that is seen in today's world.

In a sense, it would be as if a non-Adventist were to go around saying, "Adventism is the religion of the Bible, and you should read about it and attend its services." Of course, no SDA is going to try to prevent such a person from providing them with this unexpected advertising.

On the other hand, if someone was going around saying, "There is no true religion," or, "Adventists are teaching error because they believe that Christ only has one Church," or "It doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you claim to be a Christian," then any faithful Bible student is going to want to correct that individual if he is willing to be corrected.

Similarly, in the first incident, the non-followers were going around saying, "Yahshua is the Messiah," and His disciples wanted to stop them simply because they had not (yet?) connected themselves with their company. Yahshua was by no means endorsing the idea that following Him, and being in perfect unity with His personally-selected disciples, was not critical for growth and ultimately salvation. He was by no means supporting the idea that He was not planning to establish a specific, set-apart group of individuals tasked with the continuing course of His earthly ministry.

Certainly, we read this in the Gospel of Matthew, "Not everyone that saith unto me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven. Many will say to me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works?' And then will I profess unto them, 'I never knew you, depart from me, ye that work iniquity.'" (Mat 7:21-23)

It should be clear, then, that by Yahshua telling His disciples, “Leave them alone,” He was not saying – as He did to the thief on the cross – “They will be with me in paradise.” It was still necessary for those individuals, after having preached in the name of the Messiah, to do as Paul did, and come and learn the things that He was showing to His followers for their souls’ sakes. It is true He did not speak any judgment of them at that time... but we know that this was not the time of His judgment.

Now, when it comes to Yahshua’s modern followers, we would certainly not “forbid” anyone to speak in the name of Christ Yahshua. At the same time, with the amount of error, misinformation, and outright falsehood that now calls itself “Christianity,” it would be a rejection of the Spirit of Love should we turn a blind eye to what takes place around us. We are told specifically to “teach all nations,” and we can only do that properly if we know what “the Church” is, what Yahweh has called us – individually and collectively – to be.

As I began by saying, the question, “What is the Church” can be answered in several ways. It will not take long to establish what the answers are from the Bible. However, I do want to emphasize, as I have before, that Yahshua does call for firm decisions to be made on these matters. He said, to those who opposed His work, “He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.” (Luke 11:23) This is a “line in the sand,” and a point of separation that none can ignore while remaining true to themselves or the Scriptures.

In this generation, Yahshua calls for a perfect unity among His people. There can be no divisions in terms of judgment or our understanding of principles. There can be no “middle ground” when it comes to our common calling, and therefore after seeing what the Bible says about the Church, and what it is, we should have sufficient tools to equip us for dealing with those whom we meet – whether in person, by email, or the forums – to show them these decided positions that our Father is leading them to take.

There are many things that the Church may be said to be, but there are five definitions I wish to present tonight, and then to briefly discuss what these definitions mean.

1) The Church is the Bride of Christ

The Scriptures tell us, “For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one Husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.” (2Cor 11:2) We also read, “And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem [the habitation of the Saints], coming down from God out of Heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her Husband,” (Rev 21:2) and, “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church.” (Eph 5:31, 32)

Christ and His Bride are (spiritually speaking) one flesh. There is perfect unity between the Two, and therefore one cannot claim to be One with Christ, if he does not also claim to be One

with the Church. This is because Christ is joined unto, and is One with, his Church. If that is not immediately obvious, please give these words some thought.

John reflects a related idea when he says, “If a man say, ‘I love God,’ and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” (1John 4:20)

There is no diplomacy here, no softening of words. One who says, “I love God,” but does not love his brother is declared to be a “liar.” Similarly, IF one believes the Bible, which teaches that Christ is “joined to” His Bride, and “one with” His bride, then one cannot claim, “I belong to Christ,” without also saying, “I belong to the Church.” One who does this would be a deceiver – or at least badly deceived himself.

The ecumenical and non-denominational movements have done much to undermine this Biblical teaching, because they know that if there is truly only ONE Church, and Christ is joined to It, then if they are found not to be teaching all the truth as it is in Yahshua, and teaching the perfection of His character, they will be proven entirely false. So they attempt to weaken this idea of unity with Christ both by downplaying the importance of baptism and membership, and also by applying strange, new definitions to what the word “Church” means, making it some invisible, hazy, loosely connected subset of humanity that has nothing to do with its Biblical definition (that I will provide in a moment).

But if we believe that the Church is the Bride of Christ, and understand the spiritual and scriptural significance of the word “Bride,” then we will realize there can be no other way to understand the teachings of the Master. He has a visible “people” with whom He is “One,” and He is “One” with no other people. He may love all mankind, but He is not joined unto all men. Thus, those who wish to be, and seek to be, one with Him, they cannot do so without being of and within His people. Those who truly know Christ, truly know His character, could not conceive of it being any other way.

2) The Church is a Set of Called-out Witnesses

The Church of Christ may be described by what the word itself means. The word “Church” is translated from the Greek word *ekklesia*, which means, “An assembly of people called out from their homes into a public place.” The very word “Church” immediately reveals two key elements of Christian doctrine. First, it indicates that they are called “out” from where they used to be. They are no longer “at home” in this world, but have been called to be separate from it, being told that, “Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.” (James 4:4b) The one who is of this Church, the follower of Christ and member of His Bride, is called out from the world, its spirit, and its policies. He is a stranger to them, and no longer subject to the enslavement of Satan, the “god of this world.” (2Cor 4:4)

Second, the word itself states that the called-out ones are “an assembly of people [in] a public place.” Those who say, “I am a member of the spiritual Church,” or “I belong to the invisible Church of Christ,” or, “I fellowship with a variety of groups,” or even, “I hold Church with my immediate family on the Sabbaths,” are contradicting what the very word itself means. They have been deceived by the ecumenical spirit that Satan has carefully, craftily inserted into the modern Churches, for the specific purpose of keeping them from the authority of the word of Yah. A Church – by definition – is a public assembly of people. There is no hidden, invisible Church of Christ. It may have gone through times of persecution and apparent defeat. It may have had to flee into the mountains or the wilderness... but it was never a “private” assembly of individuals, and it was never, at any point, a solitary, isolated experience.

The Church of Christ is about fellowship, and unity, and a public testimony of faith. That is what the word means, and what the Bible tells us through both doctrine and recorded example.

3) The Church is the Righteousness of Yah on the Earth

This, to me, is one of the most powerful ideas in the Bible; it speaks to me very deeply, and I have spoken about it several times before. The Word tells us, “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ. As though Yah did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of Yahweh in Him.” (2Cor 5:20, 21)

Yah has called us to be “in” Christ. That is a part of what being a member of His Bride means. But being in Christ, we are told that we are made “the righteousness of Yahweh,” and ambassadors to this world, praying and speaking in Yahshua’s place. Continuing from the idea that we are to be called-out witnesses, we find that Yah has called us to be His own righteousness, His own perfect and divine character, living out a witness in the darkness of this age.

We must, therefore, know and all agree as to what Yah’s righteousness actually looks like, and this requires us to agree on the principles that we are demonstrating in our testimony.

Understanding that we are the righteousness of Yahweh on the earth ought to awaken in us a sense of deep love for our Father, who has shared His own glory with His Son, and through His Son with us. He who said, “My glory will I not give to another,” (Isa 42:8) has made the Son and His Bride “One” with Him, so that no longer are we “another.” Understanding what the Church of Yah is brings us face to face with this intense unity, this intense intimacy, an intimacy so few ever come to realize.

When the Church speaks of membership, and covenant, and unity, and bearing one-another’s burdens, and holding one-another accountable as keepers of our brethren’s souls... the world does not like these terms. The world does not love these concepts, because the world does not

know how to truly love. It is repelled by true intimacy, and so it invents fears concerning loss of identity, and fear of correction, and a host of other idolatrous concepts.

But we speak of these things, and rejoice that our Father has called us to this relationship, this amazing oneness that is reflected in our spirits, minds, bodies, and our outward activities.

4) The Church is the Sanctifying Power of Yahweh through Human Beings

We have looked at this in a number of previous studies, but I include it here as one of the key things that the Church of Yah truly is. We are told, “And [Yahweh] gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; 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.” (Eph 4:11-13)

The Church is the means, the tool, for the sanctifying and perfecting of the saints. Certainly, Yahweh can, and has, worked with individuals. Certainly, He has called some for special tasks and ministries. Certainly He – as the creator – could establish any means of perfecting His saints that He desired.

And yet, He has chosen to have us sanctify one-another. “Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.” (Pro 27:17) The Bible describes for us, in detail, Yah’s “tool” for sanctifying His people – and it is the only tool that is so described. Remember, justification – accepting Yahshua as one’s Savior – is only the beginning of the Christian journey; but the Word tells us that without “sanctification,” or “holiness” that comes from growth and character development, “no man shall see the Lord.” (Heb 12:14) How important, then, is it that we understand the true role of the Church in bringing forth a people that can stand in the judgment of the Almighty?

This passage from Ephesians 4 is the only one in the Bible that tells us precisely the means by which the saints are to be “perfected.” In other places we are told to “be perfect,” and to walk perfectly before Yah, but this is the only passage that tells us how Yah works to accomplish it within us. Bible study, meditation, self-denial, prayer, sacrificial giving, these are all good things, and will accompany the sanctified life... but salvation is not by these “works.” These are not sufficient by themselves to complete the work of Yah within His people. It is the Church that has been given the task, and the ability, to cultivate faith, and to provide its members with “the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

5) The Church is a People of Judgment

The Church of Yahshua is an assembly of those who are called to judge. This is hardly something that one hears spoken from the pulpit in a nominal Church. There they say, “Don’t judge anyone, lest you be judged,” and “It is not our place to judge others.” In a certain sense, these statements are true (if incomplete); all judgment has been given to Yahshua with regard to the final destiny of each individual human being. And yet, these verses are not without purpose:

“Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? How much more things that pertain to this life?” (1Cor 6:2, 3)

In another place it is written, “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment,” (John 7:24) and in yet another, “Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge.” (1Cor 14:29)

The problem with some passages is that the word for “judge” and the word for “condemn” have the same root, and are often translated in the same way. The Scriptures tell us not to “condemn” one another – but it certainly presents us with the ability, even the responsibility, to decide between the righteous and the unrighteous. For example, we are to avoid false teachers. “Try the spirits whether they are of God.” (1John 4:1) The Word makes this clear: “every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov’d.” (John 3:20)

The reason why the wicked hate the light is that if they were exposed, righteous men would reprove them. But could those righteous men truly reprove evil if they were to say, “I cannot judge?” The purpose of the Church is to judge – it judges the world by its testimony and example, and it judges those who are “within” (1Cor 5:12) by reprov’ing them, by correcting them, so that they will recognize and put away their evil deeds, and live in the light.

The world fears “judgment,” and association with a people OF judgment, because the carnal mind cannot tell the difference between condemnation and righteous evaluation. The Church is commanded to judge, to determine true doctrine, and even true brethren. The Bible gives Yah’s people procedures, methods, and principles for the specific purpose of judging. We have Gospel order, the laws of voting, and so on, in order to ensure that all things are done according to the will of our Father in Heaven.

To conclude, then, we see that the Scriptures answer the question of “What is the Church” in several ways. We are the Bride of Christ, the Called-out Witnesses, the Righteousness of Yah on Earth, the Sanctifying Power of Yahweh through Human Beings, and a People of Judgment. Because of these things that the Church is, we see what we must likewise be. We are a people who are as One with one another, else we are liars if we claim to be one with the Father and Son. We are a people committed to the bonds of spiritual Marriage to the Almighty, and for this

reason we speak of covenants and standards of holiness, of victory over sin and the invincible faith – issues that are becoming less and less popular in the worldly Churches. We are a people committed to “perfecting holiness in the fear of Yah,” (2Cor 7:1) through our fellowship with one another, and our duty to righteous, loving judgment.

If the people of Yah can say “Amen” to all of these, then we agree with the Word, and we stand “with” the Messiah, not in opposition Him. We gather together, not scatter away, and will be found to be One with Him in the day when humanity is divided into only two distinct groups: those who are for, and those who are against. If we agree with these things that the Word reveals, we acknowledge that we each, as members of Christ’s own Bride, have the responsibility, and great privilege, to show these things unto others, that they may also come into agreement with the Father and Son, the Spirit and the Bride, and rejoice in the knowledge of the Son of Yah, even as their souls are made perfect through the glory of Yah.

Creation 7th day Adventism
flyingcreature@hotmail.com