

## *Women & More*

### **‘New Normal’ or New Testament**

Lesson 19: **March 19, 2015**—*authority*

Webster defines church as 1 : a building esp. for Christian public worship 2 : the whole body of Christians 3 : DENOMINATION 4 : CONGREGATION 5 : public divine worship. **From the beginning, God planned to meet with His people personally and publicly:** Remember God met and talked regularly with Adam in the Garden of Eden. But after Adam and Eve sinned, Genesis 3:18 said “*they heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of day*” (they were familiar with the sound of God in the garden). Then the sad sinful human part: “*and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden*”. And God called out to Adam, “*Where are you?*”

When we’ve sinned, we don’t really want to commune with God personally—probably won’t—but we are **adamantly** averse to meeting with Him publicly! When God called, Adam and Eve presented themselves before God publicly while He delivered rebuke, correction, instruction and then encouragement to them. We humans want all the encouragement we can get, but we don’t want the rebuke, correction or instruction in righteousness, and we’ll slip away from God’s presence publicly, first, and if repentance doesn’t follow we will slip away from private communion as well.

God was faithful to His, by-and-large, faithless people and went on to meet with them publicly establishing the **tent of meeting**, the **tabernacle**, the **temple**, the **sanctuary**, the **synagogue**, the **House of God** and the **church!** Psalm 5:7 “*But I, by your great mercy will come into your house, in reverence will I bow down toward your holy temple.* 15:1 *LORD, who may dwell in your sanctuary?* and 48:9 *Within your temple, O God, we meditate on your unfailing love.*”

The Church of Jesus Christ represents the company of believers throughout the world, yes; but Scripture is clear that it represents the individual church to be attended by those nearby. Paul wrote 13 of the New Testament’s 26 books, in the form of letters, and 9 were addressed to the **assembled** saints (churches) in Rome, Corinth (2), Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colosse and Thessalonica (2); 3 to pastors, Timothy (2) and Titus, and 1 to a leader of the church at Colosse named Philemon. Psalm 52:9 “*I will praise you forever for what you have done; in your name I will hope for your name is good. I will praise you in the presence of your saints.*”

Jesus demonstrated His passion for the ‘church’ in John 2:16, “*To those who sold doves he said, ‘Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market!’ and verse 17 quotes Psalm 69:9 by saying, ‘His disciples remembered that it is written: ‘Zeal for your house will consume me.’*”

Philippians 3:6 records that unbelieving Saul, who became believing Paul, persecuted the church. But the church became very important to Paul, as it already was to Barnabas! Acts 11:25-26—“*Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year **Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people.** The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.*”

Some have left the ‘church’ because they are convinced that it no longer reflects what God *built* it to be and do. What is God’s view on evangelical churches—those that preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ—that have drifted? Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, served in the Temple of God as priests, and they sorely abused their trust; they committed immoral acts and practiced wickedness galore, and “*had no regard for the LORD.*” But this did not prompt God to permit the faithful to neglect Temple worship, and, it did not prevent Him from miraculously placing a small boy in that place of worship who would become Israel’s prophet, priest, judge and king-maker.

Those ‘some’ may contend that was Old Testament. In the New Testament’s book of Revelation, God wrote special letters to seven churches, through John, and told them what pleased Him about them and what displeased Him. And some of them were unbelievably sinful—talk about ‘drift’—but He never once told them to stop assembling together. In fact, in a letter to one of the churches that did not please Him in any way, He graciously invited them to repent in 3:20: “*Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.*” And then He made them and us a glorious promise in verse 21 “*To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.*”

Rev. Charles Spurgeon wrote: “Ah! Our Savior is no fickle lover. He doth not feel enchanted for a while with some gleams of beauty from His church’s eye, and then afterwards cast her off because of her unfaithfulness. Nay, He married her in old eternity; and it is written of Jehovah, ‘He hateth putting away.’”

Polls taken show that some have left the ‘church’ for reasons as diverse as being too busy, too many family and home responsibilities, work, and a physical move away from their church. Then there are those in judgment of the ‘church’ who claim that it is filled with hypocrites, cliques and the *judgmental*, so much so that they would feel what—out of place? We don’t abandon so many other groupings—family, community, clubs, workplace—because they are dysfunctional. God could have done church perfectly and flawlessly, without us, but He chose to use His people to do it even knowing that we would be what we are without His constant help—God help us to be Your church!

Others claim that 'church' is not helping them—not doing anything for them. John MacArthur, Jr.—“Biblical preaching cannot be geared toward meeting felt needs...but must uphold the truth of God and demand that it be heeded.” Truth is: some have just stopped believing in the Truth of God!

One of the polls revealed that the desire for fellowship was ten points ahead of preaching the Word. And here is the problem: Fellowship should be a natural outcropping, overflow, a blessed result, of the Word being preached, of people coming to Christ in faith, of repentance and reconciliation and renewal. It is the preaching of the Word that has the power unto salvation. MacArthur again, “The Jews wanted to see power, the Greeks wanted to hear wisdom. **Only those who responded to the foolishness of the preached message found both.**”

We cannot honor God and dishonor His Word...If He said “*Forsake not the assembling*” and we forsake, we are in rebellion against Him! Spurgeon said, “It is ill to offer God one duty stained with the blood of another.” MacArthur again, “Somewhere along the line evangelicals decided to make friends with the world. Pragmatism is carnal wisdom—spiritually bankrupt and contrary to the Word of God.” (Pragmatism = amusement; a ‘justifying-the-means’ attitude.)

MacArthur again, “Merely churching the unchurched accomplishes nothing of eternal value. ...Bible-believing evangelicals have therefore had to wage a continual war against current human opinion.” **We must hear from God!** And we can be sure that He has spoken: *Let there be; the LORD is One; Be careful to; I will never leave you; I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; Be saved all you ends of the earth; Come let us reason together; Call unto Me; I am with you; I am for you; Fear not; Come to Me; Follow Me, and I am coming soon!*

In Matthew 16:18, after Peter had said, “*I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God*” Jesus answered, “*And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock*”—upon the **bedrock** of that statement that only three other followers of Christ we know of had made: Thomas, Nathanael and Martha—“*I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.*” Be absolutely sure, Jesus Christ built the church, and He has divine purpose for it! Those who would abandon the church are saying—hidden between fine lines—I love Jesus but I have no use for His church. Charles Spurgeon: “Pray that you may always trust Christ in order that you may always love Him. If love be cold, be sure that faith is drooping.” If our relationship with Christ is right, we will love what He loves including His church! Jesus’ brother John warned us in 1 John 2:19 “*They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us, but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.*”

Some have added that they don't attend *organized* church! Is this to say that they would embrace unorganized church? We know that Jesus built His church; He organized it from its beginnings. But **we humans resist authority!** It's a fact, and Scripture is all over it. We will absolutely push the envelope: If God said do not do it, we, in essence, ask why not? And that didn't work out well for Eve! One reason that God organized the church so emphatically is so that we would have to practice and get 'good'—with God's help—at submitting to authority. Rebellion is at the root of opposition to organized church wherever the location: what other kind of evangelical church is there? (As missionaries to Japan, almost the first thing my family did was to plant a church in Matsudo!)

A healthy *organized* church is committed to the following:

**-godly leadership**—In Acts 20:28 Paul told the leaders, “*Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.*” In Numbers 12:8b the LORD had asked Aaron and Miriam: “**Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?**” *9The anger of the LORD burned against them, and he left them.*”

**-biblical teaching and preaching**—truth proclaimed powerfully from Scripture

**-biblical goals**—God-centered worship: find out what God wants

**-discipleship**—spiritual growth: training, correction, rebuke, etc.

**-outreach**—evangelism: daily witness anytime and everywhere

**-fellowship**—care and concern for one another

**-commitment** to the Lord's house and to His family

► EMAIL received on March 3, 2004, from former Sunday school teacher, Mike Arnett: A church goer wrote a letter to the editor of a newspaper and complained that it made no sense to go to church every Sunday. “I've gone for 30 years now,” he wrote, “and in that time I have heard something like 3,000 sermons. But for the life of me, I can't remember a single one of them. So, I think I'm wasting my time and the pastors are wasting theirs by giving sermons at all.”

This started a real controversy in the 'Letters to the Editor' column, much to the delight of the editor. It went on for weeks until someone wrote this clincher: “I've been married for 30 years now. In that time my wife has cooked some 32,000 meals. But, for the life of me, I cannot recall the entire menu for a single one of those meals. But I do know this...they all nourished me and gave me the strength I needed to do my work. If my wife had not given me those meals, I would be physically dead today. Likewise, if I had not gone to church for nourishment, I would be spiritually dead today!”

I did not get to go today  
I was so very weak  
To hear God speak through pastor  
His game plan for my week

I did not see the House of God  
Nor His 'family' within  
I did not get to greet a soul  
Or together worship Him

The Lord, He knows my heart  
That I'd be there at length  
Not missing *one* more spiritual meal  
If only I had the strength

R. Jeanene Moore  
(April 2014--fighting pneumonia; couldn't go)

When you are down to nothing, God is up to something! Faith sees the invisible, believes the incredible and receives the impossible! Thank God for our physical and **spiritual nourishment!** Psalm 135:1-2—*"Praise the LORD. Praise the name of the LORD, praise him, you servants of the LORD; 2you who minister in the house of the LORD, in the courts of the house of our God."*

Paul described the "church of the living God" as "the pillar and foundation of the truth"—word for Word—in 1 Timothy 3:14-16: *"Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, 15if I am delayed, **you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.** 16Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory."*

The church is God's House—it is His Family—and through its leadership He instructs, corrects, encourages and rebukes. And God is always speaking literally unless He says otherwise! The church is to have overseers—under the headship of the Lord Jesus Christ—and it is charged with administering discipline. The church **is** God's training and sending agency; it is where the two ordinances of the church are to be administered: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The church is what the Lord Jesus Christ will come for in the 'air' so that we would be with Him forever where He is. And a warning for those who are not looking for His coming—Hebrews 9:28—He's not coming for them!

The church is believers' equipping center; filling station, and launching pad!