

# What is the Work of the Church?

**Should the Church be accomplishing a *work*? Is there a purpose for the Church - a great *good* set before it? *Why* did Jesus say, "I will build my Church"? *What* was that Church to accomplish? *Where* is that Church today? *Who* are its members? Is that Church *organized*? Do you need to *belong* to "an organized religion" to be *saved*? Here are the plain answers to these vitally important questions from the pages of your own Bible!**

By Garner Ted Armstrong

**L**ook at organized religion in the world today. Hundreds of religious radio programs promote this or that belief; dozens of television programs, some of them professionally tailored, with immaculate backdrops of beautiful buildings and auditoriums, prayer towers, handsome young people singing, guest stars, and personal testimonies reach millions upon millions of people each Sunday morning - the "electronic church" is *big business*!

Churches dot the landscape; their steeples looming above neighboring buildings; their somnolent, stately, stained-glass dignity exuding a quiet air of permanence.

All of these radio programs, telecasts, and local church denominations have one thing in common - they are in the business of *religion*.

But beyond some of the fundamental beliefs, such as the belief in Jesus Christ as personal Saviour, one discovers a remarkable divergence of structure, organization, system of doctrine and practice.

*Why all this confusion?*

Why are the churches so divided? Is this what Jesus Christ really had in mind when He said, "I will build my church"? (Matthew 16:18)

Paul asked, "Is Christ divided?" (1 Corinthians 1:13) and urged the Corinthian church to speak the same thing - to *avoid* splits and divisions.

Before answering some of the major questions, we need to see, from the Bible, what the church really is.

## What is the Church?

Today, millions believe the church is a "building." They might ask, "Where is your church?" meaning, where is the building in which you meet? But the original word for "church" has nothing to do with a building. The word "ecclesia," appearing in Matthew 16:18, means, "called-out ones; chosen ones; separated ones; group," or a number of *especially chosen people*. "An assembly" is a good definition. The church consists of *people* who collectively form the "church" and who may meet in a *building*. Through the years, that building in which the called-out ones have met has gradually been referred to as the "church building," and, finally, referred to as a "church."

But the Church Jesus built owned no building.

Let's look at the Bible concerning Jesus' own true Church - letting the Word of God teach us the *truth* on

this vital subject.

When Jesus Christ first began His public ministry, He chose a group of *students*, or *disciples*, that He intended teaching. Millions are familiar with His famous statement to Peter, "Come, and I will make you a fisher of men."

However, few realize there were more than *one hundred and twenty* of those disciples; that *many* of the original disciples *left* Jesus Christ following a particularly strong statement about His being the "bread of life" (John 6:44-69). *Why* did Jesus choose "students," or disciples?

First, He called them to be *trained*; to *learn*, as *students* sitting at His feet.

The whole purpose for Jesus calling and training the twelve was to deliver to them a *message* which they would in turn carry to the *whole world*!

He said, "...my meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to *finish His work*" (John 4:34).

Jesus insisted His Father had commissioned Him; sent Him to accomplish a *work*, and to *call* others to Him as His disciples - training and teaching *them* to *continue* the work He began!

"But I have greater witness than that of John; for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me" (John 5:36). Later, He was to explain how the Father had given Him specific instructions on what He was to preach!

"He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath One that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. For *I have not spoken of myself*, but the Father which sent me, *He* gave me a commandment, *what* I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that His commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, *even as the Father said unto me, so I speak*" (John 12:48-50).

Notice how Jesus *taught* His disciples: "And Jesus went about all Galilee, *teaching* in their synagogues, and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom... and there followed Him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan. And seeing the multitudes, He went up into a mountain; and when He was set, *His disciples* came unto Him: and He opened His mouth, and *taught them*, saying, ..." (Matthew 4:23 to Matthew 5:2).

Then follows the beautiful teachings of Matthew 5, 6, and 7. including the "beatitudes."

Jesus avoided big crowds and went up into a mountain, outdistancing those who would follow. *Only His disciples* were with Him, at first. Perhaps others gradually arrived, and the crowd may have numbered a few hundred by the time His famous "Sermon on the Mount" was complete, but the Bible says He "taught *them*," meaning *His own disciples*.

During His three and one-half year ministry, Jesus was to continually *teach* these men. He taught by analogy; by simile and parable, and by plain speech. He taught them through gentle rebuke and admonition; by instruction, and especially by *example*.

He explained that His message was *concealed* from the masses, and revealed *only* to His specially-chosen "students," who were to form His group of called-out ones to finish the great *work* He was beginning!

On one occasion, His disciples wondered about a parable He had related concerning the sower, who scattered seeds on good ground, stony places, and by the wayside. "And the disciples came, and said unto Him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is *given unto you* to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of heaven, but to *them* it is *not given*... for in them is fulfilled the prophecy

of Isaiah, which saith, 'By hearing ye shall hear, and shall hear, and shall not understand, and seeing, ye shall see, and shall not perceive': For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them" (Matthew 13:10-15).

*Read that again.* This is a shocking *opposite* to that which *most* believe! Most assume Jesus tried to *convert* people whenever He could. Most people *assume* Jesus was striving to reach every deceived, lost person - that He would *never* turn away from a single person. They assume He was trying to SAVE THE WORLD *THEN!*

Yet, He said to the Syro-Phoenician woman that His message was *not given* to any but the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" and said it was not fit to take the children's meat and give it to "dogs." Had it not been for *her own outstanding example of faith*, He would have turned away, and ignored her request that her child be healed.

But she persevered! She told Him, Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat of the scraps that fall from the children's table." He granted her request as an *exception* to the rule. Had she not demonstrated her faith and humility, He no doubt would have gone His way. No, Jesus did not come to heal every sick person He could find; to "save" everyone He could; to save the world - THEN!

Clearly, He said it as "*not given*" to the masses to be converted THEN; to be healed, THEN!

See the proof from His own words! "...LEST at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should BE CONVERTED, and I should HEAL them!" (Matthew 13:15).

Jesus DID NOT COME TO SAVE THE WORLD *THEN!*

Yet, God says, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise... but is longsuffering to us-ward, *not willing that any should perish*, but that *all* should come to *repentance*" (2 Peter 3:9).

It is God's perfect will that *all mankind* be saved:

He says, "And so ALL ISRAEL [including the *Jews*] SHALL BE SAVED!" (Romans 11:26).

This eleventh chapter of Romans explains the *time sequence* of God's plan; explains how the "natural branches" (the *Jews* - Jesus came "unto His own, and His *own* received Him not") were "cut off," and the others (Gentiles) "grafted in," as a different kind of fruit tree might be grafted onto the trunk of another.

God says, "For God hath concluded [shut them up - allowed them to be *blinded*, spiritually] them all in UNBELIEF, that He might have mercy upon all" (Romans 11:32).

So God is determined to SAVE THE MAJORITY OF MANKIND! Yet, Christ did NOT TRY to SAVE the world, *then!* He will set His hand to *save* the majority of mankind - but that time is *not yet!*

## WHY Did Christ Come the First Time?

There are several profoundly important reasons *why* Christ came, in the flesh, as the humble carpenter from Nazareth; WHY He called and trained His students; WHY he avoided the masses when He could; WHY He did not go out of His way to heal or convert as many as possible - THEN!

*First*, Christ came to die for the *sins* of mankind - YOURS AND MINE! "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to SAVE SINNERS; of whom I am chief!" (1 Timothy 1:15). But Paul goes on to explain the prophetic *sequence of events* to Timothy; "Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me *first* Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, *for a pattern* [as an

example] to them which should *hereafter* [from that time to this - and into the future!] believe on Him to life everlasting" (1 Timothy 1:16).

*Sin* is the transgression of the TEN COMMANDMENTS; God's law (I John 3:4). The result of sin - the "payoff," or the "wages" of sin is DEATH (Romans 6:23). Because Christ's one life was worth more than all other human life put together, for He was the CREATOR of humanity (Hebrews 1st chapter; John 1st chapter), His death atoned for the sins of all!

"So Christ was ONCE offered to *bear the sins of many*; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation!" (Hebrews 9:28).

Christ also came to QUALIFY to be future WORLD RULER! He said, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I OVERCAME, and am set down with my Father in HIS throne!" (Revelation 3:21).

Satan was the original WORLD RULER. As a created, angelic being, he occupied the most exalted spiritual office on earth. (Ezekiel 28:12-17). He attempted to overthrow God from His throne in heaven (Isaiah 14:13, 14), and was, instead, hurled down to this earth as a twisted, perverted, diabolical *adversary* (Revelation 12:4, 9; with Luke 10:18).

Now, Satan is called the "god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4). and the "prince of the power of the AIR" (Ephesians 2:2), which is a part of this physical earth.

As such, he still reigns as the present evil WORLD RULER! He has been completely DISQUALIFIED, but he has not yet been REMOVED! *That* will not be accomplished until the time of the second-coming of Christ! (Revelation 20:1, 2).

Christ QUALIFIED to become "KING OF KINGS and LORD OF LORDS" (Revelation 19:16), but He has NOT YET SET UP HIS KINGDOM!

Today, God is *NOT governing* here on this earth! This is SATAN'S world, not God's!

The purely mythological notion that pictures a great, spiritual "tug of war" between the forces of good and evil; between God and Satan, with God, through all these confused churches, trying to "save the world," while the Devil is trying to keep the world *lost* is nonsense! Further, it depicts Satan as more powerful than God - for, after all, who is really WINNING?

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The Garner Ted Armstrong Evangelistic Association  
P.O. Box 747

Flint, TX 75762

Phone: (903) 561-7070 • Fax: (903) 561-4141

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