

Is Jesus Christ the CEO of Corporate Religion?

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Christians regularly read the Gospels that tell of the life of Christ. And each Gospel tells it from a different point of view. Christians, by definition, are supposedly “followers of Christ.” But why don’t today’s “Christians” understand what Jesus was trying to teach us about His life?

Temple vs Synagogues

Jesus’ parents went to the synagogue regularly. But what was the origin of the synagogues? Synagogues gained prominence in the New Testament, but they were present simultaneously with the Temple.

Where was God’s presence? In the Temple – not in the synagogues!

Did Jesus claim the Temple belonged to God? Yes, He said, “Make **NOT My Father’s house** a house of merchandise.” John 2:16

Did Jesus claim the synagogues belonged to God? No. He said to His disciples, “But beware of men; for they will deliver you up to councils, and they will scourge you in **THEIR** synagogues. Matt 10:17

Counterfeit Religion

The synagogues were run by the Pharisees, the **enemies** of Christ. The synagogues existed simultaneously with the Temple, but God’s presence was in the Temple, not in the synagogues.

The synagogues were a place – a building – where the Israelites came inside, sat down, and heard “man” tell them what to believe about God.

On the contrary, **No one**, except the priests, were allowed to go into the Temple – under penalty of Death!

The synagogues were started by the Pharisees who taught a Counterfeit Religion. They were the enemies of Jesus Christ and eventually called for His death by crucifixion.

What is the Model for the Organized Church of Today?

The model for today's Organized Church is the Pharisaical Synagogue model – the one founded by those who called for the Death of Jesus Christ!

Did Jesus go door to door to hand out literature?

No. Jesus' example for us is just to live our life. Jesus walked from town to town. He did not go door to door, He did not invite people "to the synagogue (church?), He did not put pressure on anyone to believe what He believed.

Did Jesus go door to door to collect money for His ministry? Did He use any means to try to collect money for His ministry?

No.

Did Jesus plan large meetings, or did they just happen?

Jesus never planned a large meeting, nor did He instruct His disciples to do that. Any large group that He spoke to gathered spontaneously to hear Him talk, such as when He fed the five thousand, plus women and children – at least 15,000 people whom He had spoken to for the whole day. That's why they were hungry.

But how successful were these large meetings at "winning souls"?

Not at all successful! The entire audience missed His point completely. They were unable to understand Spiritual things. They wanted to force Jesus to be their king – so He could give them free food, and destroy their rulers – the Romans. Jesus had to flee in a boat before they laid hands on Him.

NONE of them understood anything spiritual that Jesus said. Because their hearts and minds had not yet been opened by the Lord, they only understood in physical – sense knowledge – terms: what they could understand with their five senses. They had no ability to understand revelation knowledge – the knowledge of spiritual things.

The disciples were with Jesus every day, yet they did not understand much of what He told them. He said,

"I have much to tell you, but you cannot bear it now." John 16:12

In what situations did Jesus have success?

In one on one encounters: the woman at the well, the woman taken in adultery, Mary Magdalene, Zaccheus, the tax collector. Again, even the disciples didn't understand Jesus when He spoke to them about spiritual things UNTIL they had TROUBLE – the crucifixion of Jesus Christ!

Only THEN did they receive “power from on high” (at Pentecost): they received the ability to understand the Truth of God’s Word – the Words of Jesus Christ.

Did Jesus form an organized church when He was on earth?

No. Even when Jesus knew that soon He would be crucified, He made no plans to form an Organized Church.

In fact, He stated He does not endorse any situation in which one person spiritually lords it over another. That is a pagan practice.

When James and John brought their mother to ask Jesus to give her sons, James and John, the preferred places in Jesus’ kingdom, the other disciples became indignant! Jesus told all of His disciples, including James and John:

“You know the princes of the **Heathen** (Non-Christians: often mistranslated “Gentiles”) lord it over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them.

“**But it shall NOT be so among you:** but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your servant;

“And whosoever will be first among you, let him be your slave:

“Even as the Son of man came NOT to be served unto, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for **the many.**” Matthew 21:25-28

In churches today, the minister is considered to be more important than the members. He (or she) is placed on a pedestal – admired and “served.” Jesus specifically said that should NOT be the case.

But when a hierarchy exists, and when Christians aren’t willing to study – in depth - the Bible for themselves, and when Christians aren’t willing to have a personal relationship with the Lord – preferring to have a personal relationship with “the church” – whomever is at the top of the hierarchical order is lauded and applauded as someone very special.

Jesus specifically said that should NOT happen!

Did Jesus instruct the disciples to form an organized church?

No. Christians met in homes, and by the riverbank, to worship God. They were never instructed to build church buildings in which to worship.

Is the word “church” in the Bible?

No. It has been “written in” by the translators – who were NOT inspired by God as were the authors of the original manuscripts.

The word *ecclesia*, almost always mistranslated as *church*, literally means “the called ones” or the “called out ones.” Any suggestion that the literal definition includes the present-day idea of a “church” is eliminated by the passage in Acts 19:23-41 where Paul was speaking to the Ephesians for Jesus Christ – and against the pagan Goddess Diana, who was the main industry in Ephesus. The main work of the Ephesians was making statues of the goddess Diana, and Paul was “bad for business.”

The Ephesians became angry at Paul and spontaneously formed a lynch mob to attack him. The Greek word used for this riotous lynch mob is *ecclesia*. Obviously, the translators could not call this unruly mob a “church” so they chose to use the word “assembly.”

But this proves that the word *ecclesia* does not mean “church” – in the way that present-day Christians view the word “church.” The word *ecclesia* just means a group of people who all believe the same way – whether it is good or bad. The group doesn’t even have to know one another, or live in the same place.

Why did God tell Moses to build the sanctuary in the wilderness?

What was its purpose?

Who designed every minute part of the whole sanctuary structure, the sanctuary service, and even the clothes of the priests – down to the last tassel?

The Sanctuary in the wilderness was a temporary structure that could be moved from place to place as the Israelites traveled through the wilderness. The actual building was approximately 450 square feet – the size of a small, one bedroom apartment.

There were over a million Israelites in the wilderness during the Exodus, some believe there were 2 to 3 times more. Obviously, this sanctuary was not built to

be their “church.” Furthermore, as has been said, God commanded the Israelites NOT to enter the Sanctuary (except for the priests) under penalty of **Death**.

The Temple in Jerusalem: Was it a place for Israelites to “go to church”?

The temple in Jerusalem was 90 ft long and 30 ft wide = 2700 sq. ft. – about the size of an average house in America.

Experts have proven that one of the most successful methods of memorization is through picture association. The Lord uses this teaching technique because He knows that humans are extremely visual creatures. This is one of the main reasons Jesus taught with parables. Picture stories help people understand and remember the many abstract principles of salvation by associating them with visual images.

God first illustrated the plan of salvation immediately after Adam and Eve sinned by having them sacrifice a lamb. This process impressed upon the first couple the heinous results of sin and foreshadowed the ultimate death of the "Lamb of God" for their sins.

By the time the children of Israel had spent 400 years in Egypt serving as slaves to a pagan nation, the Lord saw that His people needed a complete re-education regarding the "big picture" of the plan of redemption-including their role and God's role in cleansing them from their sins and restoring them to His image. There were no Bibles and it is unlikely the Israelites could read, except for the Scribes and the Pharisees.

This is why, when the children of Israel finally limped out of Egypt with scars on their backs and visions of the Promised Land dancing in their minds, God didn't immediately lead them north toward the Promised Land, but south toward Mt. Sinai. He was about to deliver to this infant nation one of the most powerful and enduring object lessons ever recorded. And He would do it almost entirely with symbols.

The Lord told Moses, "Let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them" (Exodus 25:8). Keep in mind that this earthly tabernacle was never intended to be an edifice to shelter God from the elements. Jehovah is not a homeless God. When Solomon was building the first temple in Jerusalem, he said: "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?" (1 Kings 8:27)

Nor was this structure meant to be used for “church services” for the Israelites.

This, then, is the key to the puzzle of the sanctuary. The structure and ceremonies were to serve as symbols to illustrate the sequence and process of salvation.

As we consider the sanctuary and its symbols, the best example would be from the first sanctuary - the one that Moses had the people construct in the wilderness. This portable tent was often called the "tabernacle." Moses was not allowed to make even one decision regarding the building of the sanctuary or the sanctuary services. God designed everything, Himself. In the same way God spelled out the precise dimensions for Noah's Ark, God gave Moses exact plans for everything in the sanctuary, even to the minutest detail of the accessories.

This shows us clearly that God makes His own Plans. Our job is to carry out God's Plans – not to make our OWN plans!

Many Christians say, "God gave us a brain so we can figure things out." That is NOT true! God gave us a brain so we can do what HE decides He wants done!

Like Jesus, we are on earth "to do the Will of the Father." John 6:38

God told Moses, "According to all that I show thee . . . even so shall ye make it" (Exodus 25:9). Unlike any other building ever constructed, the sanctuary would be a three-dimensional, life-sized lesson book. Every component, from the largest curtain to the tiniest piece of furniture, had a symbolic meaning that helped the children of Israel see, experience, and comprehend the plan of salvation.

A Journey to God

Let's begin a brief tour through this unusual structure and learn a few basic lessons before examining the deeper meanings of the sanctuary system. The sanctuary consisted of three principal areas: the courtyard, the holy place, and the most holy place. These three locations represent the three primary steps in the process of salvation known as justification, sanctification, and glorification.

The holy of holies, the tabernacle's most sacred area, represents the presence of God. The walls around the courtyard and the holy place vividly illustrate man's separation from God. "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear" (Isaiah 59:2). All of the sanctuary services represent a sinner's journey back to God. In the first three chapters of the Bible, sin enters the world and man is evicted from the Garden of Eden. In the last three chapters, sin is eradicated and man is

restored to the spiritual *garden* and communion with God.

The Door

The first thing we notice as we approach the sanctuary is that there is only one door. Not even a fire exit! Remember Jesus' words: "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved" (John 10:9).

All are redeemed by Jesus alone. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). The only way to God is through Christ, the only door. When we confess our sins, and our heart is right with God, He forgives us. This is termed "justification" – in simple terms it means "to be set right with God."

The Courtyard

The entire edifice of the sanctuary was surrounded by a courtyard made of linen curtains set up in a very specific orientation. It was twice as long as it was wide (150 feet long and 75 feet wide), and was to be set up with the one opening facing east. That arrangement ensured that the worshipers and priests who stood at the door had their backs to the rising sun instead of facing it like the pagan sun-worshipping religions of the day. God's people worship the Creator instead of the creation.

Unfortunately, most who today consider themselves "Christians" spiritually "face east" - because they worship on the day of the pagan sun god – Sunday! Unwittingly, they are worshiping the creation – rather than the Creator. The pagans believed that their life came from the sun – so they worshiped what they considered to be their - - life giver!

It is unlikely that so many in the world today would believe in evolution if Christians worshiped on the day God made holy – Saturday – as a memorial of His Creation, rather than the pagan day of the sun god – Sunday!

"Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.

"And on the seventh day (Saturday), God ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made.

"And God blessed the seventh day, and made it holy (sanctified it): because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made." Genesis 2:1-3

It is God, Himself, who blessed the Sabbath – the seventh day – Saturday – and **made it holy**. No human being – not even the Pope – can change the holiness of God from one day to another.

The Altar of Burnt Offering

Immediately upon entering the door of the courtyard sat the brazen altar of ascent offerings. The altar was actually made of acacia wood and overlaid with brass.

The Laver

Between the altar of burnt offerings and the tabernacle itself stood the laver. It was also made of brass and was filled with water for the symbolic cleansing of the priests.

The picture of sinners' justification became clear in the courtyard. Before God gave the Israelites His Law on tables of stone, He saved them from slavery in Egypt by virtue of their faith in the Passover Lamb (symbolized by the altar) and baptized them in the sea (when they crossed the Red Sea - represented by the laver).

The Holy Place

The actual tabernacle stood in the west half of the courtyard. It was divided into two compartments or rooms. While the width of the two rooms was the same, the length of the first room, the holy place, was twice as long as that of the most holy place. The walls of the central structure were made of acacia boards overlaid with gold and connected with silver hardware (Exodus 26).

All who entered the holy place to minister saw themselves reflected in the golden walls on every side, reminding them that the eyes of the Lord see all. "And he made a covering for the tent of rams' skins dyed red, and a covering of badgers' skins above that" (Exodus 36:19). The priests could look up and see that they served under a red skin. Likewise, Christians are a nation of priests that serve Jesus under His blood.

The holy place had three articles of furniture. We will review them one by one.

The Golden Lampstand

Just inside the holy place on the left (south) side, stood the seven golden candlestick branches (see Exodus 25:31-40). They were not wax candles as we know them, but lamps fueled by pure olive oil. The priests trimmed the wicks

daily, and refilled the bowls with oil so that the candlestick would constantly be a source of light for the holy place. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12).

He also said, "Ye are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). The olive oil in the lamps symbolized the God's spirit that fills His followers with light and truth. The lamp is a symbol of the Word, as well (Psalm 119:105).

The Table of Showbread

Opposite the lamp was the table of showbread on the north side. It was constructed of acacia wood and covered with gold (Exodus 25:23-30). On it were kept 12 loaves of unleavened bread (Leviticus 24:5-9) bread made without leaven, or yeast. In the Bible, leaven (yeast = fermentation) is a symbol in sin. These loaves were symbolic of Jesus, who is the sinless "bread of life" (John 6:35). The number 12 signified the 12 tribes of Israel and 12 apostles of Jesus who were to feed God's people with the bread of life-which is also a symbol of the Bible (Matthew 4:4).

The Altar of Incense

The altar of incense was located directly across from the door standing against the ornate veil – a very thick curtain - that separated the holy place from the most holy place. Like several other items in the sanctuary, it was also made of acacia wood and covered with gold (Exodus 30:1-3). It was much smaller than the altar in the courtyard and contained a brass pot that held hot coals from the brazen altar of burnt offerings. It was here that the priest burned a very special blend of incense that filled the sanctuary with a sweet-smelling cloud, representing the prayers of intercession and confession of the believers sweetened by God's Spirit (Exodus 30:8).

The Holy Place represents the process of sanctification. This corresponds to the wilderness wanderings of Israel for 40 years – the average length of an adult life. A man was not considered to be a man until he reached the age of 30. The life expectancy was approximately 70, so the adult life was 40 years. This 40 years of maturity, during which there are many trials and tribulations, is the time in our life when we **should** learn to understand that we need Jesus Christ to run our life.

The pillar of fire represented the seven candlesticks in the sanctuary, and the manna was their showbread. The pillar of cloud was their cloud of incense.

Sanctification is the process in the Christian's life of learning to obey and trust God completely. Each time we sin we ask for forgiveness. However, God offers

more than forgiveness when we confess. In 1 John 1:9, He promises us that, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

It is that "cleansing from unrighteousness" that constitutes the process of sanctification. The key ingredients in our sanctification are a devotional life in the Word, prayer, and living the life that witnesses to others that Jesus Christ has given us His character and disposition.

The Most Holy Place

The length of the most holy place equaled its width so that it formed a square. It was also as high as it was wide and long, making it a perfect cube. That area contained only one piece of furniture – the ark of the covenant containing the Ten Commandments.

The Veil

This veil, or thick curtain, separating the holy and the most holy places of the sanctuary has great significance, because it was this veil that tore at the very moment Jesus died on the cross (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). His death symbolized the end of the need for the exclusive Levitical priesthood to mediate between man and God.

The veil represents the body of Jesus (Hebrews 10:19, 20). It was only by passing through this veil that access was possible to the most holy place (Hebrews 4:16). The tearing of the veil symbolized the death of the Lamb of God, and the end to ritual services. The believer now has access directly to Jesus Christ – who is God in human form.

We need no one between Jesus Christ and ourselves – not a church nor a minister – nor any type of theologian.

The Bible says:

“You need no man to teach you. . . One is your teacher, Christ.” 1 John 2:27; Matt 23:8

Jesus Christ will teach us directly. Certainly, we can study together, but there is no need for rituals, and buildings, and hierarchy. God says:

“I will be your God, and you will be My people.” Jer 30:22

The Ark of the Covenant

Inside the most holy place, or "holy of holies," was one piece of furniture - the ark of the covenant. This sacred box, also constructed of acacia wood and covered with gold, contained the tables of stone upon which God had written the Ten Commandments. Later it also contained Aaron's rod that had budded and a small pot of manna.

The lid of the ark was called the "mercy seat" (Exodus 25:17), and above it was the shining glory of the Lord, or Shekinah (which literally means "the dwelling"), radiating between two covering cherubs, or angels, on either end of the ark. This was a symbol of the throne of God and the presence of the Almighty in heaven. The walls of the most holy place were engraved with many angels, representing the clouds of living angels that surround God in heaven (1 Kings 6:29).

How It All Works

The sanctuary shows how God deals with sin. Sin cannot be ignored. Its wages are death (Romans 6:23). The law can't be changed to make sinners not guilty. Sin's wages were paid by Christ's death on the cross. That's why Jesus said, "It is finished." John 19:30

What was "finished"? The payment for the "sin of the WORLD."

That's why John the Baptist introduced Jesus on the banks of the Jordan by saying, "Behold the Lamb of God, who TAKES AWAY the sin of the WORLD." John 1:29

Let's follow a sin as it is confessed, and then processed through the sanctuary.

The Courtyard Ministry

When a sinner became convicted of sin by God's Spirit and wanted to confess it, he came to the door of the courtyard with a spotless animal (usually a lamb) to sacrifice. He laid his hands on the head of the innocent lamb and confessed his sin. This symbolically transferred his sin to the lamb. Then with his own hand he had to slay the animal and shed its blood. This was to impress upon the repentant sinner that his sins would ultimately require the death of the spotless Lamb of God.

This was the part of the sinner in the sanctuary service. The priests, who represented the mediation of Christ between the guilty sinner and his God, did the rest.

After confessing his sin and slaying the lamb, the sinner went away forgiven, his

sin covered by the shed blood of the victim. Of course the lamb's blood didn't cover the sin, but it represented the blood of Christ, "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

After some of the blood was caught by the priest, the rest was poured out on the ground at the base of the altar and the animal was burnt on the altar. The altar symbolizes the cross where Jesus was sacrificed for the sins of the world. His blood was spilt on the ground at the foot of the cross when the centurion pierced His side (John 19:34).

The blood of the lamb, symbolically bearing the guilt of the sinner, was then taken by the priest and transferred to the holy place of the sanctuary. However, the priest never went into the sanctuary without first cleansing himself at the laver. This washing is symbolic of baptism and is listed as one of the symbols for salvation. (Acts 2:38) The Israelites had to cross the Red Sea before they were free from the bondage of Egypt. "And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea" (1 Corinthians 10:2).

So in the courtyard we pass through the fire and water. Jesus said, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5).

In the holy place the smoke of the incense rising from the altar represented the intercession of the God's Spirit (Romans 8:26, 27). Each day the blood, bearing the guilt, was sprinkled before the veil, thus transferring the guilt from the sinner to the tabernacle. There the guilt of the repentant sinners accumulated throughout the year until the Day of Atonement.

Please note that it was the lamb – with the sin symbolically transferred to it - that was slaughtered and burned up – NOT the Israelite who sinned. Thus, we learn that God DOES separate the sin from the sinner, even though many churches teach that Jesus Christ is incapable of doing that for those who "don't want to go to heaven." They further teach that the sinner must then "go to hell" and burn either forever – or "as long as he deserves."

There is nothing in the sanctuary service that supports that theological view.

The Most Holy Place

Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest took two perfect kid goats, and lots were cast over them to determine which one would be the Lord's goat and which would be the scapegoat (called Azazel in Hebrew). After confessing his own sins and those of his family, the high priest placed his hands on the Lord's goat and confessed the sins of the entire congregation, sins that

symbolically had accumulated in the holy place during the year. Then the Lord's goat was slain, and the blood was taken by the high priest into the most holy place and offered before the mercy seat of the ark where the presence of God dwelt.

The ark of the covenant contains some of the most beautiful and significant symbolism of God's entire plan of salvation. Inside the ark, between the golden bowl of manna, symbolizing God's providence, and Aaron's rod that budded, symbolizing God's authority and discipline – which is always remedial and never punitive - were the two tables of stone on which God's finger inscribed the law that has been violated by all men (Romans 3:23). The breaking of that law is sin (1 John 3:4) and the penalty for sin is death (Romans 6:23), which was satisfied by Jesus' death on the cross.

Between the law, the ten commandments, and the all-consuming presence of God is the seat of reconciliation – often referred to as the “mercy” seat by almost all theologians - or the lid of the ark. The word mistranslated as “mercy” in the Bible, should actually be translated “loving kindness” according to Strong's Concordance. This arrangement illustrates that Jesus' loving kindness saves us – because “God is love.” (1 John 4:8) He paid the wages of sin which gave Him the authority to put His life, His character, and His disposition into every person He has ever created.

Next, the high priest transferred the sins that had polluted the sanctuary to the live goat, Azazel, which was then led away from the camp of Israelites. This symbolically removed the sins of the people and readied the sanctuary for another year of ministry. Thus, all things were right between God and His people once again.

A Broad View of Salvation

The plan of salvation is the theme of the entire Bible. The salvation of the children of Israel from Egypt follows this plan exactly. Egypt corresponded to the courtyard where justification transpired. The Israelites substituted the blood of the Passover Lamb, representing Christ's subsequent death on the cross, for their firstborn child.

After the sacrifice came the cleansing. All of the children of Israel were "baptized" in the Red Sea (1 Corinthians 10:1, 2) symbolized by the laver.

This daily progress in character building is the process of sanctification. But what is the end result of sanctification? Eventually we come to the place where we would rather die than dishonor our Saviour by sinning. That is when the New Covenant is fulfilled in us.

"But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jeremiah 31:33).

The Old Covenant was the Ten Commandments written on stone. The Israelites at Sinai refused God's request to talk to them directly. The Israelites wanted someone in between. Because they were afraid of God and His power as manifested on Mt. Sinai, they said to Moses:

"You speak to us and we will hear: but don't let God speak with us, lest we die." Ex 20:19

Christians feel the same way today. They are afraid to have a one on one relationship with the Lord, with Jesus Christ, Himself, teaching them as they study His word.

Instead, they want a "Moses" – a church pastor or theologian - to speak to them about God. They are afraid of this God who, according to the church, will burn them in hellfire if they don't "love Him."

What a disaster the churches have caused with their very wrong view of God!

The "New Covenant" is not the elimination of the Ten Commandments, as many churches incorrectly teach, the "New Covenant" is our ability to KEEP the Ten Commandments because Jesus Christ has "put the law in our hearts."

It was the **ordinances** that were "done away with at the cross" – the temple and its rituals – NOT The Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments were written by God, Himself, with His OWN finger in STONE, showing us that they will endure forever.

But without Jesus Christ in our heart, we will be totally unable to keep them.

When God's law is our delight and pleasure and sin has no more power over us, then the process of sanctification is complete.

Our Body is the Temple

Now, our body is God's temple. We must not defile it in any way – whether physically, by what we eat or drink or how we treat our physical body, or spiritually, by what we think, how we act, and what we believe.

“Whatsoever you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” 1 Cor 10:31

“Your body is God’s temple. . . He who defiles God’s temple, him will God destroy.” 1 Cor 6:19; 3:17

Some excerpts from Amazing Facts <http://www.amazingfacts.org/news-and-features/inside-report/magazine/id/10734/t/secrets-of-the-sanctuary>

The Sanctuary/Temple was NOT a “church”

It is clear from this description that the sanctuary in the wilderness and the temple in Jerusalem, were not meant to be a **church** as Christians envision churches today. Certainly, no one was allowed to go inside (except the priests) **under penalty of Death!**

How could God be any stronger in His message to humanity that He did NOT want anyone to enter the temple - except the Priests! The penalty was DEATH!

God made NO arrangement at any time for anyone to set up an organized church in order for “man” to tell others about what to believe about God – such as the Pharisees did with the synagogues.

Instructing us in His Word, His character and His love for us is the job of Jesus Christ - Himself

“You need no man to teach you. One is your teacher – Christ. 1 John 2:27; Matt 23:8

Who set up the “organized church”? The Pharisees – the enemies of Jesus Christ – those who called for the execution of Jesus Christ, in the most horrific manner – by crucifixion!

The Pharisees and the synagogues were the counterfeit religion – in opposition to the Temple in which God’s presence resided.

God’s presence was NOT in the synagogues. It was in the temple.

Jesus said, in speaking of the temple where God’s presence resided, “Make not MY FATHER’S house a house of merchandise.” John 2:16

But later, at the end of Christ’s ministry, when His crucifixion was drawing near, Jesus again went to the temple. As He left, He said (because the leaders of the

Israelites – the Pharisees – were about to call for the Death of Christ) Jesus said, “Behold, YOUR house is left unto you Desolate” because God’s presence would no longer be there.

When Jesus was crucified, the temple curtain was rent in two, from top to bottom (showing that it was done by God – not man) and the Most Holy place was exposed revealing that God’s presence was no longer there.

If God had wanted an Organized Church -

Why didn’t God instruct Adam to start an organized church?

Why didn’t God instruct Noah to start an organized church?

Why not Joshua? Elijah? Elisha? Isaiah? Jeremiah? Ezekiel? Daniel?

Even Jesus Christ, when He was here on earth, did NOT set up an Organized church?

And No, Jesus did NOT instruct His disciples to set up an organized church.

Again, who set up the first organized church – on which ALL “Christian” churches are modeled today?

It was the ENEMIES of Christ – the Pharisees – the ones who called for His execution – who set up the Organized Church. Jesus said that the Pharisees were “of their father, the Devil (John 8:44).” ALL of today’s churches are modeled after the Pharisaical synagogues!

But doesn’t the Bible tell us NOT to “forsake the assembling of believers”?

Doesn’t that mean that we should have worship services in Organized Churches? Didn’t God ordain the “Organized Church”?

“Let us hold fast the confession of the expectation without wavering: for He is faithful that promised.

“And let us consider one another to incite to love and ideal acts:

“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves, as the manner of some is; but entreating one another: and so much the more, as you are observing the day drawing near.” Hebrews 10:23-25

To whom was the book of Hebrews written?

“The letter was addressed primarily to Israelite converts to Christianity who no longer followed the Pharisees who were the leaders in the synagogues – the “Organized Church” of the day. These Israelites were familiar with the Old Testament and were being tempted to revert to Phariseeism and/or to pervert the true gospel by the infiltration of Phariseeism. (Galatians 2:14)

“Some have suggested that these professing Israelite Christians were thinking of merging with a sect, such as the Essenes at Qumran near the Dead Sea, who lived an ascetic life. The accounts by Josephus and Philo show that the Essenes (Philo: *Essaioi*) led a strictly celibate and communal life — often compared by scholars to later Christian monastic living – a plan of salvation **by works** - something the Bible condemns.

“Now the Spirit speaks expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits, and doctrines of devils:

“Speaking lies in hypocrisy: having their conscience seared with a hot iron;

“**Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from eating foods** (incorrectly translated “meats”) that God has created to be received with thanksgiving of them that believe and know the truth.” 1 Timothy 4:1-3

The author of the book of Hebrews warns against this ascetic, monastic life by saying:

“Let us hold fast the confession of the expectation without wavering: for He is faithful that promised.

“And let us consider one another to incite to love and ideal acts:

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves, as the manner of some is; but entreating one another: and so much the more, as you are observing the day drawing near.” Hebrews 10:23-25

“**Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves, as the manner of some is** (such as the Essenes and their ascetic, monastic, life of “salvation by works”) but entreating one another. . .”

In this passage, the author of the book of Hebrews is NOT endorsing a system of “Organized churches” as the “assembling of believers” as that would be like the Pharisees were doing in the synagogues, a system that Jesus strongly rebuked which undoubtedly culminated in His being put to death by these same leaders of

the “Organized church” – the Pharisees.

Instead, the author of Hebrews is denouncing the idea of living a celibate, monastic, life far away from the masses of humanity who need to learn of the perfect Life of Jesus and God’s marvelous grace and salvation. They were – and we are – to be “lights” in a dark world.

The Israelite Christians and those who had converted from paganism (the nations) were meeting in homes and in groups along the riverbanks, worshipping on the Seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday) – the Lord’s Day. The pagans, on the other hand, worshiped their gods in gorgeous temples of stone with magnificent adornments, even though the Bible says:

“Howbeit the most High dwells NOT in temples made with hands. . .” Acts 7:48

“God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwells NOT in temples made with hands.” Acts 17:24

God does NOT dwell in temples (churches) made with hands. Our body is the temple of God’s spirit. He dwells in us.

“What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (God’s breath of holiness) which is IN YOU, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own

“For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s. 1 Corinthians 6:19,20

When Jesus was on earth, He made no attempt to set up an Organized church. Even when He was soon to be crucified, he strongly rejected His disciples’ desire to be part of a hierarchy (“Who will sit on your left and your right?” they asked Jesus). But Jesus said,

“The Unbelievers (Gentiles - heathen) lord it over each other, but it shall NOT be that way among you (the Believers).” Mark 10:42,43

Again, the pagans (the heathen – the unbelievers) had a strong hierarchy, but Jesus instructed His followers to reject that system because when “man” lords it over man, his “power” always corrupts him.

Shutting oneself off in a monastery makes one useless to God in addition to the secret sin of self-righteousness, in which one concentrates only on his own life and his own salvation, rather than being concerned for, and working for, the

salvation of others.

When the author of Hebrews warned against “forsaking the assembling of ourselves together” he was not endorsing an “Organized Church” but instead he was warning the Israelite Christians NOT to sequester themselves away from life and civilization by pursuing a monastic, ascetic, self-centered existence.

In Conclusion:

Jesus just lived His life, going from place to place. He never set up large meetings, even though there were times that thousands of people spontaneously came to hear Him speak. But those large crowds never understood Christ’s spiritual message. Large meetings were not successful – even with Jesus Christ – the creator of the universe.

Jesus never went door to door to speak to random people about the Gospel - those whose hearts and minds had **not yet** been opened by the Lord.

Corporate Religion is not only ineffective – it is NOT the way of Jesus Christ!

This is Corporate Religion! “Have Bigger meetings! Win more souls for the church!

But Bigger is rarely Better!

Churches want to “work for God” – churches want to “win many souls for God” by going door to door, handing out literature that the majority of people throw in the trash. Or by holding large meetings, advertising extensively, making alter calls at the meetings.

But these are not the ways of Jesus Christ!

Only God can change the heart. We are called to “disciple” those whose hearts have already been changed by Jesus Christ.

“Strait is the gate, and Narrow is the way, that leads unto life (zoe = eonian life – the life of Christ in us), and FEW there be that find it.” Matt 7:14

“Many are called, but few are chosen.” Matt 22:14

The Lord has a “little flock. . .” Luke 12:32

Noah preached about the coming flood for 120 years. But he never made even ONE convert.

Jesus Christ, the Creator of the Universe, the One who had healed numerous people, and even raised some from the dead, had only FIVE people who stuck by Him during His crucifixion: One disciple – John (all the other disciples fled for their life), Jesus’ own mother, Mary, Mary Magdalene, and 2 other women.

Jesus Christ is NOT the CEO of Corporate Religion.

Jesus did the will of His Father, by letting God bring to Him (Jesus) – in individual encounters - those who were willing to listen. How much more effective are His ways – than the churches’ ways than the ways of today’s churches!

The Biblical accounts of Jesus’ life are telling us to “just live our life” – exhibiting the character of Christ - as we go about our daily business. And then God will bring TO US – in simple day to day encounters - those whose minds and hearts He has opened.

It may be a repairperson who comes to your home, it may be a chance encounter with someone in a grocery store line, it may be a clerk in a department store, it may be a fellow employee. And we don’t have to initiate a particular health or spiritual subject. God will impress that person (without their knowledge of what He is doing), to open the way for the conversation to take place.

Our job is to be alert and aware of these openings God has presented to us, and gently capitalize on them immediately, just as Jesus did during His life and ministry on earth.

It was this method of “witnessing” that Jesus was referring to when He said,

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also: and greater works than these shall he do. . .” John 14:12

When Jesus was on earth, He was only one “Man” who was traveling only by foot. How much “greater works” can we, His followers, do by just living “His life” - because He has placed each of us, His followers, in our individual locations all over the world.

Jesus said, “Follow Me.” Matt 4:19 “Do as I do.”

So - - - What did Jesus do?

He didn’t form an organized church

He didn't organize big meetings.

He did not go door to door to "witness."

Jesus just lived His life – walking from place to place, having encounters with individual, "witnessing" by His disposition and character - - - doing NOT His own will, but the will of His Father.

Why do we mere human beings think we have a "better" way? We Don't!

As usual, You CAN'T Improve on God!