

# Who (or What) and Where is God's True Church?

by Glenn Moore

Today there is a climate within the Seventh-Day Adventist Church of fear and trepidation whenever the issue of "church organization" is addressed. It seems that there is mass confusion on the part of many members over such questions as "Who is the Church?", "What is the Church?", "Where is the Church?". But this is not just a problem within our own church--it seems people in other churches are having the same problem. Some believe that the church is located in a small town called "Vatican City", just outside of Rome. Many Adventists believe that the church is located near Washington D.C. Still, some take the position that the "church" is the building that the members meet in. Others believe that the organizational structure is the church. Friends, the Bible is very clear on the issue of "Who, What, and Where is the Church?", if we are willing to have an open mind and allow God's Word to speak.

In 1 Corinthians 1:2 it gives us a simple introduction that answers "Who is the Church?" "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints." First question--tell me if you will where in this text it says that the church is a special "building", or one that must be officially "registered" by either the government or by some "counsel" working with the disciples? It says no such thing! In fact here in this text it states plainly that the church (which happens to be at Corinth) are those "who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints." Next question, is the "organization" the church or the "people"? The Bible (in this text and many others) is very clear! Yes, I'm sure they had organization but the organization was not the church--the people were the church! Now if this were as far as we went with this we would have many who would oppose this definition--but it's not my word, but the Word of God speaking to you. When you answer the question of "Who" is the church, you also automatically answer the question "What" is the church--because many people believe the church to be a "thing". If the church is not an organization, a building, place of meeting, or structure--then the alternative to that is that the church is a group of "people"--"who are sanctified in Christ Jesus"!! The church is not a "What" it is a "Who"--and in many people's minds that is a dangerous thought--because it appears to give to an individual or group of individuals unlimited power. But this is not so, when God's Word and the Holy Spirit are a restraining force among the members!

Let's look now at Hebrews 12:22-23: "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven." The church are those people who are registered in heaven. Does that mean the registration of members here on this earth is invalid? Well, not exactly--what it means is that if a person's name is on the "books" here on this earth and this person is also registered in "heaven"--then their names on this earth merely ratifies what is already in heaven. But will the reverse also work--by putting the names on the books here on earth does that put them in heaven also? No, it does not! But be careful--if you are a Seventh-Day Adventist and you believe that kind of theology then you are not far removed from being a Catholic, for they also

believe that what is ratified on earth by the church is binding upon heaven, and that God has no choice but to accept this. But can God be forced to conform to the dictates and whims of mere mortal men!?! Can we really be so blind as to espouse that a group of local church members, a church board, a conference committee, or a conference president can decide who is and who is not a church member? Oh, what have we come to that we should hold to such foolish thoughts?!

I was in attendance at an "illegal" and "malicious" disfellowshipping of a group of Seventh-Day Adventists in Texas. Now whether they were deserving of disfellowshipping is one thing (I don't believe they had true grounds for disfellowshipping them), but the proceeding itself was called into question almost from the beginning. First, they are very particular about who can or cannot attend--they try to keep as many outsiders out of the assembly as possible, even if they happen to hold membership in a sister church. Next, before the people to be disciplined by the church were called in for questioning the church leaders together with the members were holding a special religious service in the main room with the subjects of discipline kept separate. Then they had a worship service--not from the Bible, but from the Church Manual. And finally, when they are all called into the room to hear the charges and issues one of the members under discipline raises a question about the proceedings and in response he is told by the chairman that he has no right to raise a question because "you are not a Seventh-Day Adventist". Of course, they were eventually disfellowshipped. But it seems in the eyes of leadership church membership had been decided in advance before the proceedings even had a chance to begin. Such arrogance!! But it is so typical for those in positions of leadership in the church to arbitrarily decide "who" IS and "who is not" part of God's church!

"John declared to the Jews that their standing before God was to be decided by their character and life. Profession was worthless. If their life and character were not in harmony with God's law, they were not His people." Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages*, p. 107.

Jesus also made it clear concerning the Jews and their standing before God. They believed that by being born a descendant of Abraham they were automatically part of God's church. But listen to what Jesus tells them: "I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you. I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father.' They answered and said unto him, 'Abraham is our father.' Jesus said unto them, 'If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. . . If God were your Father, ye would love me . . . Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.'" (*John* 8:37-40, 42, 44)

Paul in Romans makes this statement--"But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel". (Romans 9:6) In other words, they are not all God's children who claim to be God's children, or, take this to its logical conclusion--they are not all church members who claim to be church members.

"Through the agency of Romanism, Satan took the world captive. The professed church of God was swept into the ranks of this delusion, and for more than a thousand years the people of God suffered under the dragon's ire." Ellen White, *Signs of the Times*, November 1, 1899.

"Romanists have persisted in bringing against Protestants the charge of heresy and willful separation from the true church. But these accusations apply rather to themselves. They are the ones who laid down the banner of Christ and departed from 'the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.' Jude 3." Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 51.

Now, here comes the dilemma for most Adventists--and that is the teaching that we, the Seventh-Day Adventist church is the "Remnant Church" of Bible prophecy--and there will be no other church to come after this. Well, first of all let me point out that I agree with this statement in principle but not according to the false interpretation ascribed to it in the minds of many. We are the "remnant church" but since the church (according to the Bible) is not a human organization, building, or structure, it (the church) cannot be limited to or even defined in such narrow terms as one that holds membership with the conference. Therefore, being part of the "Remnant" is on a conditional basis. No, we don't need to resort to the common teaching of some of a "remnant within a remnant"--the Bible is very clear (both Jesus, John and Paul makes it clear) that any church which formally attaches itself to false teachings is no longer God's church, remnant or otherwise. Now, are we saying the church is Babylon? No, but the church *could* (as in the past) become a part of Babylon as is abundantly clear from this statement:

"We must arouse as a people and cleanse the camp of Israel. Licentiousness, unlawful intimacy, and unholy practices are coming in among us in a large degree; and ministers who are handling sacred things are guilty of sin in this respect. They are coveting their neighbor's wives, and the seventh commandment is broken. *We are in danger of becoming a sister to fallen Babylon*, of allowing our churches to become corrupted, and filled with every foul spirit, a cage for every unclean and hateful bird; and will we be clear unless we make decided movements to cure the existing ills?" 21MR 380

At times I have pointed out to people that the church can become a part of Babylon, if there is not repentance from the leaders and members alike. But in response I am often accused of saying the church is "Babylon" when I in fact said no such thing! I merely point out to them that (unlike the Baptists and other Protestant groups) we do not believe in "once saved always saved"--so where do we get the idea that "once the remnant church always the remnant church"? God is able to raise up a remnant church from the stones if need be!! Besides, why would I want to call myself "Babylon"? If I know deep down in my heart that I am not in "Babylon", then why does raising this question cause such controversy? Could it be that it is because the people fear that they really are in Babylon?

Why is it so difficult for those who study the Bible and claim to be Christians to understand these simple and straightforward texts--the church is made up of individuals who are consecrated to God and obedient to His commands. Revelation 12:17 says "And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the

commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." The woman, in prophecy, represents the "church". Since the woman here described is "pure" then this is a representation of God's true church. Now notice something very interesting here in this text. As Seventh-Day Adventists we have been taught that "we are the 'remnant church' of Bible Prophecy according to Revelation 12:17; 13:10; and 14:12". Well, what this text is actually saying is that there is a "pure" church which is being persecuted and flees into the wilderness. That "remnant" is not an organized church at all, but is just exactly what the text says it is--"the remnant of her seed". Now the text is even more specific and gives the 2 main identifying marks of this "remnant": They are those "which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ".

Now help me out here if you can: Does this teach that they would "try" to keep God's commands, or actually do them? Do churches "keep the commandments of God"? How can a building or a corporate structure "keep the commandments of God"--is that really possible? Now I don't think it is, but let's give the benefit of the doubt--suppose it is possible for an organization or church structure to do this, what would happen if just one member of that organization decides he will not keep God's commandments? Can they qualify as the "remnant" of Revelation 12:17? No, they cannot. Contrary to popular opinion, very few will be saved at the end. So the Seventh-Day Adventist church, since it is (by definition of the Bible) the people who obey God and have the testimony of Jesus--it is the faithful individual who is counted in heaven as part of the body of Christ, His true church on earth!! If this is your experience then you ARE the remnant church, NOT the remnant church within a remnant church!! Don't you realize what this means? You can be set free now--you are no longer under bondage to the whims of theologians who want to control you with fear and tell you that if you are *not a member of the church you will be eternally lost* or a variation on that is *if you are not a member of this special group over here you will be lost!!* It's not true--because the church is much bigger than anything you could imagine and you can join it right now by making a decision to follow Jesus in all things and to keep ALL His 10 commandments! Amen?

"Then Peter opened his mouth and said: In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him." *Acts 10:34, 35.*

"He that confesses me before men, him will I confess before my Father and he that denies me before men, him will I deny before my Father." *Matthew 10:32,33.*

Now to the question of "Where is the true church?" Notice what it says in Ephesians: "And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." *Ephesians 1:22-23. Jeremiah 23:24* says (speaking of God) "Do I not fill heaven and earth?" Now we don't refer to this with the idea that God is everything or is in everything, but merely that He is "Omni-present"--filling heaven and earth. Since the Lord fills heaven and earth and the church is the "fullness" of the Lord then that means that the true church is the biggest thing in the universe, and contains the largest membership (even

though it may be very small here on this earth)!! And does the Bible teach that there is more than one church? No, it does not. "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling." *Ephesians* 4:4.

So, what about those who are "in" the church or "hold membership" in the church but do not have the Spirit of Christ dwelling in them? Are they truly in the church? *Romans* 8:9 says "But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His." Wait a minute! If he holds membership in the church, and professes to be a follower of Christ, but does not have his Spirit within Him then he is not a part of Christ--right, is that what it says? Then if he is not a part of Christ then it is clear that he cannot be part of the "body of Christ", and the body of Christ is defined by Paul in *Ephesians* as His "church" which Christ is the head of. Therefore, "if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not . . ." part of his true church. Does that clarify the issue? It should, the Bible is very clear about who the church is, what it is (and is not), and where it is!

Do you want to be part of the "true church"? All you have to do is surrender your heart completely to Christ and let Him fill you with His Spirit, and purpose by the power of God that you will keep His commandments and have His saving faith! Study God's word every day and apply the lessons learned to your life wherever you may be. Then, as opportunity presents itself, seek out others of like faith. Do not listen to teachers or preachers who you know in your heart (as confirmed by Scripture and the Testimonies) that they are leading you and others astray. Test all things by the Word of God, and if the teaching is of God then embrace it with your whole heart, without fear of the consequences--for God will see you through to the end, no matter what happens to you in this life. If you know the teaching to be false or in error, then reprove, rebuke, exhort and if need be let your absence speak for you--do not continue to attend the meetings of one you know to be teaching falsehoods. Oh, and the same applies to video or audio presentations--if they contain falsehoods, please, for your own souls sake and the sake of your family--put them away!

"God is displeased with us when we go to listen to error, without being obliged to go; for unless He sends us to those meetings, where error is forced home to the people by the power of the will, He will not keep us. The angels cease their watchful care over us, and we are left to the buffetings of the enemy, to be darkened and weakened by him and the power of his evil angels; and the light around us becomes contaminated with the darkness." Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 125.

Melancthon, one of the early reformers of the Protestant Reformation, made this statement about the church and it is here referred to by sister White: "There is no other church than the assembly of those who have the Word of God and who are purified by it." Ellen G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 4, p. 237.

I want to be a member of that church, don't you friend? By faith, we can be if we will just surrender.

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