

# Where is the Church of God Today?

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May the grace and peace of God be upon you!

Just before Jesus' return to this Earth, God is preparing a group of people to rule and lead the way when the Kingdom of God is setup on this Earth. This group of people is being prepared by God to become kings and priests in the future Kingdom of God (1 Peter 2:9). This group is the Church of God.

The Greek word for "church" means assembly. The Church is to be a special assembly for God with a specific purpose before and after the return of Jesus Christ. Before Jesus' return, the Church's members ought to develop God's holy character with His help and be a light to the world (Mat. 5:14-16). After Jesus' return, the Church's members will inherit the Kingdom of God and be literal rulers in that Kingdom (Rev. 20:4-5).

Just before Jesus returns to this Earth, Christ will descend from the Kingdom of Heaven and will appear in the clouds and call upon all the elects to partake of the Wedding Supper. In 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 we read, *"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words."* And these words are comforting indeed! May God speed that day!

So after we are all resurrected and caught up in the Kingdom of Heaven, we will partake of the Wedding Supper. The Wedding Supper is a symbolic event where Christ (the Head of the Church) marries the wife (the Church). In Ephesians 5:22-32 we read about this "great mystery" that is revealed unto us. Here we read that husbands should love their wives just as Christ loved the Church to the point of dying for it. In Colossians 1:18 we read that Jesus is the Head of the Church and that the Church is the body. There will be a symbolic union between Christ and the Church at the grandiose Wedding Supper (Matthew 22:1-14; Luke 14:15-24; Rev. 19:7-9). There, we will be One with God for eternity! There, we will become part of the Family of God forever!

After the Wedding Supper, Jesus returns to this Earth in a spectacular manner to establish His Kingdom on this Earth (Zec. 14:1-15; Dan. 2:44; Rev. 19:11-21)! After that the saints live eternally ruling and teaching the world the Way of life of God.

As we can see, God has prepared a **great reward** for His saints. So the question arises, where is the Church of God today? Where do I need to be in order to attain this great reward?

## Wheats and Tares

Some churches today would like to think that they are the only way to salvation but in reality God is working with different organizations in the end times. **No one organization holds a monopoly on salvation!** To say so, is limiting the power, the grace, and the reach of God! Yet, there may be many churches that God is working with, but in God's eyes, there's only one spiritual organization (one body) grouped together from many organizations. God is working with different people throughout different organizations all across the world. This very fact proves that more important than the organization that you attend is your direct relationship with God.

Throughout all churches, there is a great variety of personalities and characteristics—some good, some bad. A perfect example of the great variety of personalities and characteristics across different churches can be found in the messages to the 7 churches in Revelation 2-3. These are messages for the first churches of those particular cities, but we can still see similar characteristics (good and bad) in churches today.

The first message is for Ephesus. This church has good works and has tested and called out those who call themselves religious leaders and are not. Also, they hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which God also hates. The Nicolaitans were a gnostic group which preached many heresies. The Nicolaitans also took the grace of God as a license to sin, especially sins concerning fornication (or sexual immorality). Those are the positive characteristics of this church; however, something negative is found—that they left their first love! They have lost that original passion that they once had, they are not as on fire as they originally were; therefore, God would love for that church to be revitalized like it was at the beginning. So this church is called to repentance.

The second message is for Smyrna. This church is not materially rich but it's rich spiritually. They have good works and have been tested through tribulations. They also call out the blasphemy of those who called themselves Jews but are not. In this context, Jews here really means spiritually Jews—or Christians. The issue highlighted here is referring to legalists who would require others to keep the Law of Moses for salvation, negating the importance of the sacrifice of Christ. They would seek justification through the works of the Law; therefore, falling from grace (Gal. 5:4). This mindset is directly opposite to the one of the Nicolaitans which uses grace as a license to sin—both mindsets are wrong! God is a God of balance, and we should be balanced too! In the New Covenant, we are at liberty, we are under grace, but that doesn't mean that we ignore the Law because the Law helps us in our sanctification process and it also helps us determine what is right from wrong (Rom. 7:12). The Law is a guide to us in our sanctification process but we should not seek to be justified by its works. So Legalism was a common problem in the Early Church era. But this church calls it out. They are tried and tested, but they overcome!

The third message is for Pergamum. Even though they dwell in a heavily influenced satanic/demonic area, this church has hold fast to God and their faith. But there are some things against them. They continued in paganism! They compromised the Way of life of God by letting

some pagan practices and heresies enter the church. They mixed paganism and Christianity—and they don't mix! They held some of the doctrines of Balaam, which encouraged fornication and idolatry. They ate things sacrificed to idols. They also allowed the doctrines of the Nicolaitans, which used grace as a license to sin—especially on sins regarding fornication as discussed earlier. Therefore, this church is called to repentance too.

The fourth message is for Thyatira. This church has good works of charity, service, faith, and patience. But something negative is found. They tolerate the teachings of Jezebel. She was a false prophetess who taught paganism that led to fornication and idolatry. They are good people on this church but they didn't have the courage to stand up and denounce what is wrong; therefore, they tolerated wrong teachings. This church is also called to repentance.

The fifth message is for Sardis. This church has some works but their works are not perfect. They have a name that they are alive, but they are spiritually dead. They have lost their passion and love for God! They are admonished to strengthen the good things they do have. They have forgotten the original teachings; therefore, they are asked to remember what they were originally taught. Their focus is on the wrong things. They are also admonished to repent.

The sixth message is for Philadelphia. This church has little strength but God has opened a door for them to do a work. They have kept the word of God and not denied His name. They also call out the legalists who called themselves spiritual Jews but are not. Some of the legalists will find the true balance of the Way of life of God in this church.

The seventh message is for Laodicea. This church doesn't have perfect works. They are called lukewarm. They want to please God but they are arrogant, prideful, and self-righteous! They have no need of anyone teaching them because they think they know everything. They think they stand and that they are good. They look down on everyone else because they think they are better. And that's why it says that they think they are rich and have need of nothing. Yet, they are actually wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked! They are called to repentance too.

If considered carefully, some these characteristics are found among churches today—good and bad. We need to examine where we attend and try to find a church with the best characteristics so we can be in a group that has the best environment for spiritual growth.

It's important to know that it's not your church that you currently attend that saves you. If the admonitions to these churches are read carefully, **overcomers are found in all of these churches**—even if they attended a church with bad characteristics. In the second sentence of Rev. 2:23 we read, "***And I will give to each one of you according to your works.***" And that's key because that's true for us today too! Again, the organization that we worship in is not as important (not that is not important at all, but is not as important) as the deeds that we do and the personal relationship that we have with God. Yes, we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus but our works complete our faith (Jam. 2:22). **We are saved by grace but we are rewarded by our works.** God will give us eternal life if we are doing what is pleasing in God's eyes even if

the organization that we are worshipping in is not perfect. From that sense, God is looking at our hearts, actions, intentions, and deeds more than where we attend.

Consider the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares in Matthew 13:24-30. The wheat represents the good Christians who overcome and the tares represent those who call themselves Christians but are not. They both grow together. In fact, if you were to see a wheat and tare in their growing stage, it would be very difficult for you to tell the difference because they look alike so much. It's not until the wheat produces fruit that you can tell that it is good! The point of the parable is that wheat and tares grow together, but Christ will sort them out at the time of the harvest.



So the church you attend does not save you even if you are among many tares, but still, we want to find a church with the best characteristics because it's fertile ground and conducive for your growth—whereas bad characteristics will hinder and stifle your growth.

### **Warning about Cults**

Special attention should be devoted to cults. As mentioned before, churches with bad characteristics will stifle your spiritual growth but some groups are so bad that they might even turn you away from God. They give Christians and God a bad name. Today, we call them cults. We need to specially watch out for these groups for our own good.

One of the characteristics of a cult is someone who claims to be a “prophet” but the prophecies that he or she speaks does not come true. This is condemned in Old Testament. In Deuteronomy 18:20-22 we read, *“But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speak in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. And if you say in your heart, ‘How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?’ When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously: **you shall not be afraid of him.**”* These false prophets might try to scare you with their tactics but God said not to be afraid of them. And to be clear, when it comes to prophecies, **it's not unlawful to speculate about the future, but it is unlawful to claim you are prophesying on behalf of God when you are not.**

As Christians, we need to test the spirits. Apostle John could have not said it better in 1 John 4:1, *“Beloved, do not believe not every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”* Some people proclaim to have visions and prophesy in the name of God, and many of them just turn out to be false prophets. Jesus warned us that in the end-times there would be **many** false prophets (Mat. 24:11).

Some charismatic leaders are “good preachers” that stir their audience but that doesn’t necessarily mean that the message they are giving is good. A preacher may deliver a bad message wrapped in a good delivery speech. But sometimes we are blinded by the emotion of the delivery rather than the intellect. We need to consider the message more than the delivery—and even more important, we need to consider the deeds of the speaker outside the podium more than what they say. Jesus said in Matthew 7:20, *“Therefore by their fruits you will know them.”* I’m not saying that all good speakers are bad—I’m just saying that we need to *“test the spirits.”* We cannot be gullible as Christians. Yeshua also said in Matthew 10:16, *“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.”*

I’ve seen many charismatic leaders abuse and lead astray their members because they have control over them. I wish it were not so. If your leader gets away with doing many bad things that a lay member would get punished for doing, you may be in a cult. If this leader requires complete submission to him or her, you may be in a cult.

Jesus warned us of abusive leaders in the end-times in Luke 12:45, *“But if that servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink, and be drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant who knew his master’s will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required, and to whom much has been committed much, of him they will ask the more.”* In Proverbs 29:2 we see a good benchmark to know if a leader is good or bad, *“When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when a wicked rules, the people groan.”*

Another cult sign to be on the lookout is if the organization is trying to exploit you financially. There’s no problem with paying tithes and offerings (we should do that), but the organization shouldn’t abuse financially of their members. If they are constantly asking for more money, asking for your assets, and making you feel bad if you can’t pay what they are requiring of you, then you may be in a cult.

Another cult characteristic is that they have an unusual apocalyptic outlook. There’s no problem watching for prophetic events (in fact, Jesus admonishes us to do so in Mat. 24:42), but if the organization is using prophetic events to scare you (to manipulate you, really) to stay in their group because only with them you’ll be safe, then you may be in a cult.

One last point to pay attention to when it comes to cults is that they proclaim to be **the only one** with the truth. The big problem here is when a member wants to leave one of these groups, and they tell the member that leaving them will cost you your eternal life because they are the only group with the truth. It's a form of manipulation! Again, there's no one group with a monopoly on salvation. If you think about it, this is the spirit of Laodicea to think you are the only one with the truth! It's a spirit of arrogance, but it becomes dangerous when they condemn you because you are not with them. To that, we say what Jesus said in Matthew 7:1, "**Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.**" That Greek word for "judge" could also mean condemn. So as Christians, we are not to condemn other believers. That's God's job, not ours (Jam. 4:11-12; Rom. 14:4).

Again, there's good religion and bad religion. For our own spiritual health, we need to watch out for the bad and search for the good. A good church should be one full of brotherly love, compassion, and charity; contrary to a bad church that is very judgmental, full of hate, abuses of their members, and rules by fear and controlling techniques.

If your religious organization has some of these cult characteristics and you fear you are in a cult, feel free to reach out to Ministries of the Firstborn. One of our main goals is to help people get out of cults. I was once part of a cult too, so I know their techniques pretty well. We can provide some guidance and counsel thru the exiting process, which may take years. God called you to a path of peace and joy, not a path of fear and doubt.

### **Worshipping in Spirit**

There is one very important point and relevant issue that we should consider when worshipping. In John 4:1-26 we read a story of Jesus witnessing to a Samaritan woman. The Samaritans had a different religion than the Jews. Among one of their differences was that they worshipped in a different mountain than Jerusalem. The Samaritan woman, perceiving that Jesus was a prophet, asked Jesus where they should worship—in her mountain or in Jerusalem. Jesus then answered in verses 21-24, "**Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.**"

In those days, the worshipers of God were concerned about where (physically) they needed to worship. But Yeshua, as the Son of God and knowing the end from the beginning, prophesied that there will come a time where the Temple would be destroyed, and the Jews will not be able to worship there anymore. In a way, Jesus was preparing them for what was about to happen but, more importantly, He was teaching His followers that **we need to learn to worship in spirit.**

And what does worshipping in spirit means? It means that no matter where you are, physically speaking, we should always be connected in spirit and worshipping God from the heart. It's not

as important if you are worshipping God in the Temple or in a cave—what truly matters is that we worship God from the heart. From that point of view, worshipping God is not a physical matter, but a spiritual. Worshipping in spirit is not an outwardly worship but an inwardly worship.

Judge for yourself, if a person comes to church regularly but comes to church because he/she is forced by the parents or because he/she likes somebody or comes to church for whatever other reason but doesn't truly comes because he/she wants to be there to worship God; do you think God will be pleased with such as person? That person is just warming a chair. That person is not worshipping God from the heart. How about a person that wanted to come to church but couldn't because one of his/her children got sick and he/she had to take him to the hospital that day? This person really wanted to come to church but couldn't. God can see that! God can see our intentions—our heart! The person that didn't go to church but wanted to, pleased God because his heart was focused on Him; whereas, the person that came to church but didn't want to come, did not worship in spirit because his heart was away from God.

As John 4:24 says, God is spirit, and those who want to worship Him must worship Him in spirit—from the soul! **Just like spirit transcends the physical so must our worship transcend beyond the physical!**

So then we realize that worshipping in spirit is the same as worship God from the heart because we want to—because we love Him! And that love that moves us to worship transcends any building and any physical organization that we may worship in!

So, again, to answer the question where is the Church of God today, we need remember that God works thru many organizations where God eventually harvests the wheats from the tares—and the wheats, from His point of view, are the spiritual entity we call the Church. Therefore, when it comes to our salvation, He's really more concerned with our heart and our intentions. He wants us to be a light to the world by living His Way of life. He's concerned with us coming to church, not to warm a seat, but to worship Him sincerely anywhere and everywhere, forever and ever!

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