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House to House Heart to Heart

VOLUME 23 NUMBER 5



I Don't Want You to Join **MY**CHURCH

Allen Webster

Preachers say frequently, “Come, join my church.” In the Bible Belt, drivers occasionally see billboards and bumper stickers that read, “Attend the church of your choice Sunday.”

It might surprise you that in the thirty-three years I have preached, I have never asked anyone to join my church nor preached “join the church of your choice.” Here’s why.

I DON'T WANT YOU TO JOIN MY CHURCH.

At the risk of sounding sarcastic (the furthest thing from my intention), I don't have a church anyone can join. The church I preach for belongs to Someone else. It began 1,985 years ago (founded: AD 33), not long after its Founder promised, “On this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).

Jesus owns His church (in the universal sense) and His churches (in the local sense) (Revelation 2–3). He paid the mortgage (Ephesians 5:25). He is its Foundation (1 Corinthians 3:11), Chief Cornerstone (1 Peter 2:5–6), and Head

(Ephesians 1:22–23). The church is His bride (Ephesians 5:21–33); she wears His name (Romans 16:16). To call her “my church” would be claiming His bride as my own.

I DON'T WANT YOU TO JOIN THE CHURCH OF YOUR CHOICE.

There are organizations one cannot join. A student cannot say, “I think I'll join the National Honor Society.” One must qualify and be invited by its representatives. A baseball player cannot say, “I'm joining the all-star team.” One is selected for this honor.

Similarly, a sinner cannot join the church. Scripture speaks not of joining but of God adding members to it: “The Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). This addition is not done by the preacher, church, or individual. No New Testament congregation—not even the apostles—voted on candidates for church membership. Only the Lord decides on membership in His church (Colossians 1:18).

Someone might say, “‘Join the church of your choice’ just means to pick a

church in your area.” It is true each Christian must find a congregation with which to worship and work, but the phrase “choose the church of your choice” usually expresses a consumer’s approach. One drives around the “marketplace” visiting various churches to find one that appeals to him. All the different flavors of churches are sampled like desserts in a cafeteria line. Some use criteria that are inconsequential—How long does it take to get there? Do they have a daycare? Do they have programs I like? One man said he changed to a new church because it was nearby; it had a beautiful building; it had comfortable pews; and it was air-conditioned. That was hardly a spiritual decision!

Others use more serious—but equally flawed—criteria: Does it have a worship style that appeals to me? Does it have a female minister? Is it soft on sin and light on doctrine? Is it accepting of homosexual marriage? Are the sermons short and sweet? Is the music good? Does it have a well-known minister?

Finding the church of “your choice” is misplaced focus. One’s first concern should be to find the church of God’s choice. It has never occurred to many people that a church can be “open for business” and not have a license from God. Some claim allegiance to Christ yet are unassociated with Him (Matthew 7:21–23).

No person was ever given the prerogative to set up his own church. Christians can only open “franchises” of Christ’s original church (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2)—complete with identical doctrines, worship, terms of entrance, and organization (Matthew 28:20). Whatever churches preach and practice must all be done with Jesus’ authority (Colossians 3:17), which He gives through His Word (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

Yet many have presumed to open their own “brands” of Christianity. They take some things from Scripture, some from tradition, and some from innovation. Mixed seed produces a different plant (Luke 8:11; Galatians 1:8; cf. Matthew 15:9). What will happen to such church plants? Jesus said, “Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted” (Matthew 15:13).

Choosing a church is an important decision. It impacts the most important part of us, our souls (Matthew 16:26), for the longest time, eternity. Our criteria should be, “Does this church match the one in the New Testament? Does it teach the true gospel? Does it follow God’s Word?”

Do not assume that if a preacher stands up with Bible in hand, he speaks for God. He may, or he may not. The Bible warns, “Take heed that you not be deceived” (Luke 21:8) for “many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1; cf. Matthew 7:15). Take your Bible and read along. The ancient Bereans were commended for searching the Scriptures daily to see if the things preached “were so” (Acts 17:11). “Test all things; hold fast what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

Someone observed, “God gave His Word so we can know about His church, and He gave His church so that we can know about His Word” (Ephesians 3:10).

I WANT YOU TO CHOOSE CHRIST’S CHURCH.

Far from wanting to discourage a decision, I very much want to encourage you to follow Jesus and become part of His church.

It is vital to choose Christ’s church, for salvation and church membership are connected. Peter’s sermon on the church’s inauguration day (Acts 2) shows that salvation and church membership are simultaneous events.

- Peter’s sermon convinced many that in executing Jesus they had killed God’s Son, whom God had raised (2:22–36).
- They desired forgiveness and salvation, asking, “What shall we do?” (2:37).
- Peter answered, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (2:38).
- Many gladly received his word, were baptized, and “about three thousand souls were added to them” (2:41). Subsequently, the Lord continued adding “to the church daily those who were being saved” (2:47).

Thus receiving remission of sins and being added to the church both occurred

at the penitent believers’ baptisms. God added His new children’s names to the Book of Life at the time of their new birth (John 3:3, 5; Philippians 4:3; Revelation 20:12).

Logically follow this through. If God adds all those He saves to His Son’s church, then all Christians are church members, and there are no saved people outside the church. The church does not save us; the church is the saved. Church membership is not the means of salvation; it is the result of salvation.

Stated another way, one must be in Christ to be saved (Ephesians 1:3; John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 2 Timothy 2:10). We are baptized “into Christ” (Galatians 3:27), which is identical to being in the church (Ephesians 1:22–23). Thus no one can be saved outside of Christ’s church. The church is not the Savior, but Christ is its Savior (Ephesians 5:23).

It is vital to choose Christ’s church because membership provides access to Christ’s blood. Salvation is only through His blood (Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 9:22). The church is purchased with His blood (Acts 20:28). His blood was shed for the remission of sins (Matthew 26:28). A sinner cleansed by that blood through immersion for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3–4) is placed in His blood-bought body where His blood continually keeps him clean (1 John 1:6–10).

Read these Scriptures in your own Bible. See if they are so. “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12).

Please don’t join my church. Choose His!



God Leads a Pretty Sheltered Life

At the end of time, imagine billions of people scattered on a great plain before God's throne. Some of the groups near the front talk heatedly—not with cringing fear or shame, but with belligerence.

"How can God judge us? How can He know about suffering?" snaps an angry brunette. She pulls back a sleeve to reveal a tattooed number from a Nazi concentration camp. "We endured terror, beatings, torture, death!"

In another group, a black man lowers his collar to show an ugly rope burn and demands, "What about this? I was lynched for no crime, but just for being black! We suffered in slave ships, were taken from loved ones, and toiled till only death gave release."

Across the plain, hundreds of groups rail against God for the evil and suffering He has permitted in His world. How lucky God is to live in heaven, where all is sweetness and light, where there is no weeping, fear, hunger, or hatred. What does God know about what man is forced to endure in this world? After all, God leads a pretty sheltered life.

Each group sends a leader to the center, chosen because he has suffered the most: A Jew from Germany, a black man from early America, an untouchable from India, an illegitimate from a conservative time, a victim from Hiroshima, and a Siberian slave. Their case is simple: Before God can be the Judge, He must endure what they have endured. God should be sentenced to live on earth—as a man!

But, since He is God, they set certain rules so His divine power cannot help Him.

- Let Him be born a Jew.
- Let the legitimacy of His birth be doubted, so that none would know His father.
- Let Him champion a cause so just, but so radical that it brings upon Him hate, condemnation, and fury of every major traditional and established religious authority.

- Let Him try to describe what no man has ever seen, heard, tasted, or smelled . . . let Him try to communicate God to men.
- Let Him be indicted on false charges, tried before a prejudiced jury, and convicted by a cowardly judge.
- Let Him see what it is to feel terribly alone, and be completely abandoned.
- Let Him be tortured and killed! Let Him die a humiliating, embarrassing death.

As each leader announces his portion of the sentence, loud murmurs of approval rise from the great throng. When the last has finished pronouncing sentence, there is a long silence. No one moves, for suddenly they know—God has already served His sentence through His Son.

Paul wrote, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bond-servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name" (Philippians 2:5–9).

Jesus wants to be your Savior before He has to be your Judge! Don't wait. There will be no excuses on that great plain. —adapted from Carl Bandy

"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin."

HEBREWS 4:15



Funk's Words

Dr. Willard Funk, the well-known dictionary publisher, was asked to select the ten most expressive words in the English language. The following is his list:

- The bitterest word: *alone*
- The most tragic word: *death*
- The most revered word: *mother*
- The most beautiful word: *love*
- The cruelest word: *revenge*
- The most peaceful word: *tranquil*
- The saddest word: *forgotten*
- The warmest word: *friendship*
- The coldest word: *no*
- The most comforting word: *faith*

Words can build up or tear down. They can comfort or hurt; they can encourage or humiliate. They can be sweet or bitter. A Christian, who seeks to imitate the gentle nature of Christ, should be careful with words. "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one" (Colossians 4:6). —Glenn Hitchcock

God's Plan for Saving Man

- Divine Love:** John 3:16
- God's Grace:** Ephesians 2:8
- Christ's Blood:** Romans 5:9
- Holy Spirit's Word:** Romans 1:16
- Sinner's Faith:** Acts 16:31
- Sinner's Repentance:** Luke 13:3
- Sinner's Confession:** Romans 10:10
- Sinner's Baptism:** 1 Peter 3:21
- Christian's Love:** Matthew 22:37
- Christian's Work:** James 2:24
- Christian's Hope:** Romans 8:24
- Christian's Endurance:** Revelation 2:10



Baptism Goggles

One of the boys in a Sunday School teacher's class announced to his teacher that his father was being baptized that Sunday. She told him that was really great. He told her he was going to go with him and wear his swim goggles.

She was curious about why the youngster would want to wear his goggles during a baptism. When she asked, the boy replied, "So I can see his sins washed away!" —Author Unknown

"Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins"

ACTS 22:16



For more material on the home and family, fathers and mothers, husbands and wives, grandparents, and family finances, go to www.housetohouse.com.

IF TOMORROW NEVER COMES

If I knew it would be the last time that
I'd see you fall asleep,
I would tuck you in more tightly, and
pray the Lord your soul to keep.

If I knew it would be the last time that
I'd see you walk out the door,
I would give you a hug and a kiss, and
call you back for just one more.

If I knew it would be the last time I'd
hear your voice lifted up in praise,
I would record each word and action, and
play them back throughout my days.

If I knew it would be the last time, I
would spare an extra minute or two,
To stop and say "I love you," instead of
assuming you know I do.

So just in case tomorrow never comes,
and today is all I get,
I'd like to say how much I love you, and I
hope we never will forget.

Tomorrow is not promised to anyone,
young or old alike,
And today may be the last chance you
get to hold your loved one tight.

So if you're waiting for tomorrow,
why not do it today?
For if tomorrow never comes,
you'll surely regret the day



That you didn't take that extra time for a
smile, a hug, or a kiss,
And you were too busy to grant someone,
what turned out to be their one last wish.

So hold your loved ones close today, and
whisper in their ear,
That you love them very much, and
you'll always hold them dear.

Take time to say "I'm sorry," "Please for-
give me," "Thank you," or "It's okay."
And if tomorrow never comes, you'll
have no regrets about today.

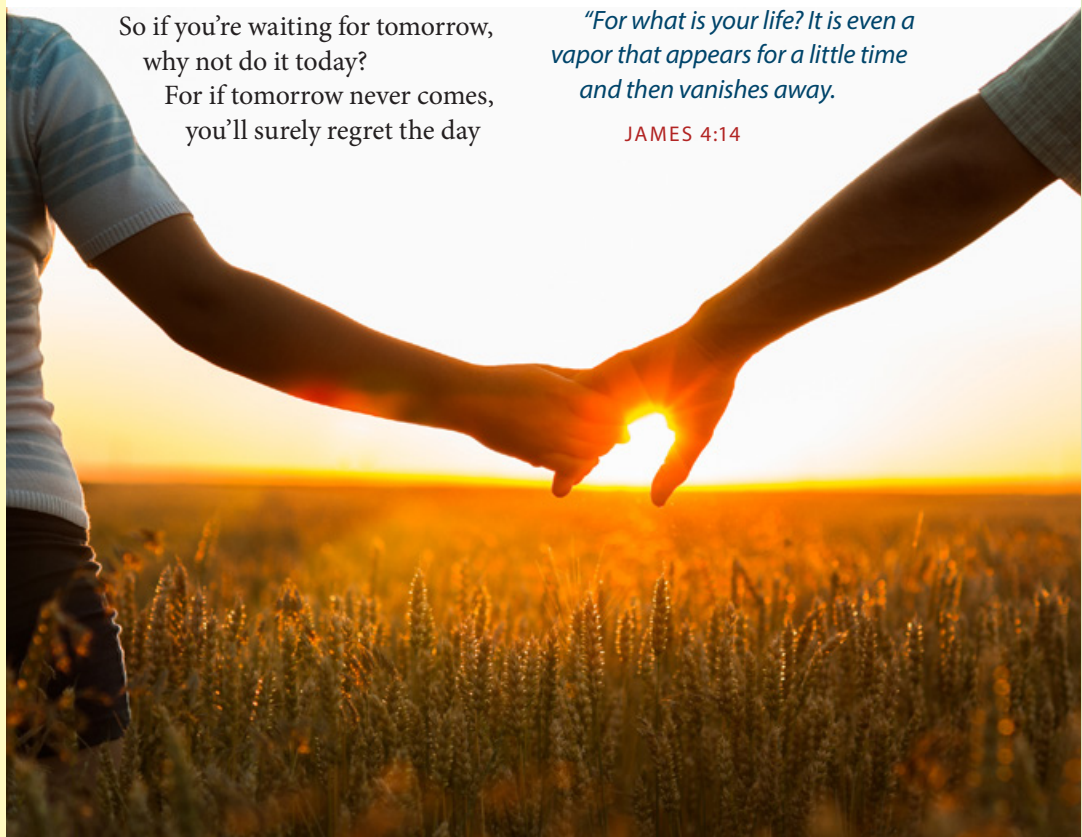
—Norma Marek 1989 (used by permission)

"Do not boast about tomorrow"

PROVERBS 27:1

*"For what is your life? It is even a
vapor that appears for a little time
and then vanishes away."*

JAMES 4:14



What Made the Man in the Chariot Happy?

There goes the treasurer in his chariot on his way back to his job in Ethiopia (Acts 8:39).

Queen Candace will be awaiting his return from Jerusalem. His responsibilities are great. He is over all her treasure. She likes his ability, and she respects his love for God enough to permit him to leave the country to worship.

As the story begins, the queen's treasurer had the privilege of learning about Jesus for the first time. Philip taught him, and when they came to water, Philip baptized him into Christ (Acts 8:35–38).

You are a new creature now, man of Ethiopia! You have made the right start for heaven by obeying the gospel. That is why you are happy!

You do not require the preacher any longer. He has taught you the truth. He has baptized you, and now there is need for him in other places. From now on, you can go on reading God's word, understanding its truths, and recognizing your responsibilities toward God, yourself, and others.

Remember Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). You have a lot of friends in Ethiopia. You are a man others respect. You are honest—honest enough to be entrusted with the queen's wealth. People believe in you, and some will believe what you say about Jesus. Roll fast, chariot wheels. Take him to tell them.

A new life means a chance to share joy with others. Happiness was born a twin, and, when we are happy, we want to

share it. With the gospel comes the urge to spread it to bless the lives of friends, relatives, and even strangers.

The power of advertising is great. An idea comes, people promote it, and before long the idea spreads throughout the nation. The man in the chariot went on his way, advertising the fact that being a new creature in Christ brought happiness.

If you are not a Christian, joy awaits you. Follow the ancient chariot to happiness! Become a follower of Jesus.

If you are a Christian, you do not need the preacher to share your joy—you have your sins blotted out, the word of God in your hand, a clear road ahead, and people waiting to be taught the truth.

The man in the chariot was happy because he found Christ. —Gayle Oler (adapted)

Cut out this section and mail it to the address on the front.

Bible Quiz

VOLUME 23:5

Send us your answers to receive a free Bible bookmark! We'll grade and return your questions and enclose the bookmark "Chapters of the Bible: Mark" as a way of saying thanks for spending time in the Word (quantities may be limited).

Name: _____
Address: _____
City/State: _____
Phone: _____

Questions taken from the King James Version

Answers to Last Issue

John: The Gospel of Belief: 1. No one (John 1:18); 2. Cephas (1:42); 3. Water to wine (2:9); 4. Is born again (3:3); 5. She was a Samaritan (4:9); 6. It was the sabbath (5:16); 7. Adultery (8:3); 8. Set (make) you free (8:32); 9. Five loaves, two fish (6:9); 10. Leftover bread (6:13); 11. Pool of Siloam (9:7); 12. Bethany (11:1); 13. Four days (11:39); 14. Husbandman (Vinedresser, Gardener) (15:1); 15. Branches (15:5); 16. Laying down his life for his friends (15:13); 17. In the same way as Jesus and God are one (17:11–12); 18. Fought for Him (18:36); 19. Passover (John 2:13–17); Nicodemus (3:9–16).

Who's Who in the Bible?

See: Genesis 2:19; 3:20; 4:8; 25:34; 32:28; 41:41; Exodus 14:21; Deuteronomy 34:9; Judges 16:6, 17–21; 1 Samuel 17; Esther 2:3–4, 16–17; Job 1:22; Daniel 6:23; Matthew 1:18; 2:16; 3:13; 26:75; 27: 35, 59–60; 28:1–6; Luke 1:13, 27; 22:48; John 11:43; 20:24–25, 28, 31; Acts 9:1–6, 15–18.

1. Who were the first man and woman on earth? _____
2. Who parted the Red Sea and helped the children of Israel escape from Egypt? _____
3. Who was the first murderer? _____
4. Who sold the birthright to his brother for a meal? _____
5. Whose name was changed to "Israel"? _____
6. Who was taken captive into Egypt and later saved his family? _____
7. Who became the leader of Israel following Moses' death? _____
8. Who had incredible strength until his hair was cut? _____
9. Who was delivered by God from a den of lions? _____
10. Who became queen by winning a beauty contest? _____
11. Who killed the giant Philistine, Goliath, and saved Israel from captivity? _____
12. Who lost riches, health, friends, and family, but remained faithful to God? _____
13. Who was the mother of Jesus? _____
14. Who did Jesus raise from the dead? _____
15. Who baptized Jesus? _____
16. Who tried to dispose of baby Jesus by making a decree to kill baby boys? _____
17. Who was Jesus' stepfather? _____
18. Which apostle denied knowing Jesus three times? _____
19. Which apostle betrayed Jesus with a kiss for money? _____
20. Who saw Jesus on the road to Damascus and became the greatest New Testament missionary? _____
21. Who would not believe that Jesus was resurrected until he saw Him with his own eyes? _____
22. Who was crucified, buried, and resurrected for all mankind? _____
23. Who was John the Baptist's mother? _____

Diamonds in the Rough

Andrew Carnegie came to America from Scotland as a small boy. He began working at a variety of jobs and eventually ended up as the largest steel manufacturer in the United States. At one time he had forty-three millionaires working for him.

A reporter asked Carnegie how he had hired forty-three millionaires. Carnegie responded that those men had not been millionaires when they started working for him but had become millionaires as a result.

The reporter's next question was, "How did you develop these men to become so valuable to you that you have paid them this much money?" Carnegie replied that men are devel-

oped the same way gold is mined. When gold is mined, several tons of dirt must be moved to get an ounce of gold; but one does not go into the mine looking for dirt—one goes in looking for the gold.

In the same way, one's relationship with God is unique. There are many reasons God could find fault with our lives. Instead, He chooses to see the potential for development when all the rough edges are knocked off.

As He views us through the eyes of Christ, God sees a diamond in the rough. Under His gentle care our lives will take on a new value. —"Pastor's Education and Book Service," Fall 1993. P. 7.

Read Romans 5:1–10.



Cut out this section and mail it to the address on the front.

Recommended Resource



The Gospel Broadcasting Network is unique in the world of religious TV—commercial free, and they never ask for money! Sponsored by the churches of Christ, GBN is available on many cable systems, as well as through their smartphone apps, the Roku device, and at gbntv.org.

I want to learn more about the Bible!

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Prayer requests or comments: _____

I would like:



☐ A Bible Correspondence Course



☐ A DVD Bible Study



☐ An In-Home Bible Study

New Tracts!

- ☐ The Rich Poor Church at Smyrna
- ☐ Not Far from the Kingdom
- ☐ That Church Is Dead
- ☐ What Responsibilities Do Members Have to Elders?



More subjects:



☐ Should the Church Be Politically Correct?



☐ Look at the Context



☐ Offering Community to Your Community



☐ But I Don't Believe the Bible



☐ Don't Give Up... Don't Ever Give Up



☐ I Have This Nagging Fear That I Am Not Saved



☐ What to Expect When You Visit the Church of Christ



☐ When I Survey the Wondrous Cross



☐ Reasons Jesus Sent the Holy Spirit



☐ Neither Male nor Female

Don't see the topic you need? Visit www.housetohouse.com for more subjects.

VOLUME 23:5



APOSTLES

FORSAKE HIM

Matthew 26:56;
Mark 14:50

SAUL

PERSECUTES

John 15:20;
Acts 7:58; 26:9

If you know for sure that the religious path you are on would not get you to heaven, would you change? If there was the possibility of a doubt, would you investigate?

Why not request a personal Bible study today?

"Be even more diligent to make your call and election sure."

2 PETER 1:10

CHRISTIANS

OBEY

John 15:10; Acts 2:41;
2 Thessalonians 1:8;
Romans 6:1–6

JEWS

REJECT HIM

Luke 10:16;
John 3:19

FELIX

POSTPONES

Acts 24:25

JUDAS

SELLS HIM

Matthew 26:14–16;
27:8–9

AGRIPPA

HESITATES

Acts 26:28

PETER

DENIES HIM

Mark 14:72;
2 Peter 2:1

WHAT SHALL I DO WITH JESUS?

Reactions to the Gospel
John 12:32

SHALLOW DISCIPLES

TURN BACK

John 6:66

PILATE

REMAINS NEUTRAL

Matthew 27:24;
12:30

SINCERITY Is Not Enough

In a New York hospital several years ago, carbon dioxide instead of oxygen was mistakenly administered to a patient.

According to the police report, the patient died almost instantly. The unfortunate patient died in spite of his sincerity and that of the hospital authorities, the anesthetist, and the surgeon.

Religion certainly must be coupled with sincerity, but a person can be religiously honest and yet, like that patient, be in an extremely unsafe spiritual condition.

Saul of Tarsus was sincere during the time the blood of Christians dripped from his hands. After his conversion to Christ he said, "I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day" (Acts 23:1); and, "Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 26:9).

The plain teaching of the Book of God is "a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105). "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12).

Make absolutely sure you are right, and then sincerely practice it. —George F. Gaines



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ASK ANY BIBLE QUESTION

Do you have something you always wanted to know about the Bible? Go to housetohouse.com/questions or send your question to us at the address on the front. We will answer as quickly as we can.