

# CHURCH OF GOD BIBLE COURSE

## LESSON NO. 19

### WHAT and WHY the CHURCH?

**The Western world has taken the existence of churches for granted. WHY and by WHOM was the institution of the Church founded? What is its PURPOSE? The answers to these questions are vital to your understanding of God's Master Plan!**

The average person believes that a church is a building with a steeple on top and a cross on its facade. Indeed some dictionaries define it that way. People - at least some -go to this building every Sunday morning to attend a "worship service."

But for many-and probably most - the church plays no part in their lives. Certainly God plays no part in their lives. God is not consciously in their world-just people, material things and interests. Of course, far back in the subconscious recesses of many minds may lie dormant the supposition that God exists. But He does not seem real to them.

Yet the Church, too, does exist. But why? What purpose does it serve?

#### CHURCH A PART OF GOD'S PLAN

There is indeed a purpose being worked out here on earth. There is a reason for the existence of mankind, as -you have learned in your previous studies. And for the working out of that awesome purpose God has a Master Plan. God's Church is an essential part of that plan!

To understand "what and why the Church" we must keep in mind the events that led up to the establishment of the Church. Also, we must not lose sight of *who* and *what* God is - the divine creating Family--- and that God is now reproducing Himself through mankind.

Remember, that Satan, formerly the cherub Lucifer, whom God had enthroned on the earth. rebelled - against God. Thus the government of God ceased to be administered on earth. Yet God allowed Satan to remain in power on that throne God would not remove him from that position until a successor had qualified to replace Satan as world ruler, and actually been inducted into office!

Pertinent to the purpose of the Church is what happened shortly after the creation of the first man, Adam. The first human followed the way of Satan, rejecting the rule of the government of God. The Eternal made Adam's decision binding on the whole human race until the restoration of God's government over the earth. Mankind would be allowed to follow the way of Satan for a duration of 6,000 years-until the Second Coming of Jesus Christ to restore God's government!

During this period, God would specially call and give His Spirit to just a few in order to serve Him in preparation for the coming Kingdom of God. God did choose the ancient nation of Israel to be His special

people, but He did not promise to give them His Holy Spirit at that time as He gave it to their prophets and a few select others.

This brings us historically to the time of Jesus the Messiah and His founding of the Church of God. But bear in mind that God's purpose is the reproduction of Himself through mankind.

The physical creation of man began with Adam-the first man. But the spiritual creation of man began with Jesus Christ-the second Adam, who qualified to replace Satan as world ruler by proving that He would obey the government of God and rule the earth by God's Law.

## **TO TRAIN FUTURE WORLD RULERS**

For Christ to restore God's government over the earth, He will need a qualified and organized staff of God Beings to assist Him in ruling the nations. They will have rejected Satan's false way and proved loyal to the government and righteous ways of God during their mortal lives.

In God's supreme Master Plan, His Church was designed to prepare that dedicated and organized staff of God Beings. The Church, then, is God's instrumentality for His overall purpose of reproducing Himself. Those God has called out of this world into His Church are the Spirit-begotten and finally to be born Family of God, which shall form the ruling Kingdom of God!

Let's study the details as revealed in the Bible. But before you begin, be sure to get your tools for study-a Bible, some paper and a pen or pencil. Look up in your Bible the scripture references given in answer to the questions and write them down. Those who follow this method of Bible study already know how helpful it is in retaining and reviewing the vital truths they learn from God's Word.

## **HOW SATAN'S WORLD BEGAN**

The Church of God has been called out of this world ( 2 Cor. 6:14-17; Rev. 18:4). But why? What's wrong with the world?

This is a world of awesome progress. Men have gone to the moon and back.

Photographs of the surface of Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn have been taken. The computer, the jet plane, the space shuttle and countless other marvels of science and technology have been produced.

But this is not only a world of awesome progress, it is also a world of appalling troubles, evils, sorrows, suffering, anguish, violence and war. The world's population is discontented and unhappy. Half of the world is illiterate. Millions live in abject poverty, filth and squalor!

How did the world get this way?

Let's briefly review what we have learned in previous lessons so we'll better understand the real purpose for God's Church.

First, everything started with God. In the beginning we find two divine Beings-God and the Word (John 1:1). They had life - self-inherent life -with no beginning of days or end of life. Their job or profession was creating. And they had love for each other. They were in perfect agreement.

There also was leadership. God was the leader, and the Word did what God told Him to do.

And God, through the Word, who later became Jesus Christ, created the angels and the entire universe, including the earth (Eph. 3:9). God placed the anointed Cherub Lucifer on a throne on the earth and put angels under him. But Lucifer and these angels rebelled against the government of God. They turned to the way of "get", rejecting the way of "give"; to hate and opposition instead of love; to vanity, coveting, wanting to get; to jealousy, envy, rebellion against authority; to competition leading to strife, violence and destruction.

Lucifer and his angels swooped up to heaven in an attempt to knock God off His throne and rule the whole universe instead of just this earth. But they were cast back down to earth. As a result of their rebellion, the earth's surface became ruined and full of darkness.

God then renewed the earth's surface in six days, creating the flora and the fauna the plants, animals, birds and fish. And He made man on the sixth day (Gen. 1:26-31).

Man was made to ultimately be born into the God Family But Adam was not given eternal life at his creation. He had only a temporary, chemical, physical existence. If Adam had taken of the tree of life, he would have eventually been given self-inherent life-self-sustaining, immortal life-from God. How? He would have received the Spirit of God, which would have begotten him spiritually as a child of God, later to be born of God!

Had Adam taken of the tree of life, God would have continued to teach Adam and Eve. They would have received much spiritual knowledge before their children were born. And the Word, the God of the Old Testament who became Jesus Christ, would have begun inculcating the right attitude in Cain and Abel soon after they were born. When they became adults, they would have taught God's way to their children.

God could have started the Church right in the Garden of Eden! Satan would have been banished, and God would have given Adam the throne of the earth, and had he made the right choice.

Adam was on trial in the Garden of Eden to see if he would qualify to replace Satan and rule the entire earth. Adam would have to reject Satan's way of living, which was represented by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But Adam made the wrong decision. He ate of the tree of "death." He did not eat of the tree of "life." He therefore did not qualify to replace Satan as ruler of the earth.

By eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam chose the way of self-acquired knowledge. It was Satan who influenced Adam, through Eve, to make the wrong decision. Satan now influenced everything Adam did. It was Satan who influenced Cain to kill Abel. It is Satan, "the god of this world" ( 2 Cor. 4:4), who has been influencing the descendants of Adam and Eve ever since!

Satan has deceived the whole world (Rev. 12:9). This is Satan's civilization, which he started through the first man, Adam, when he sinned. It includes this world's false education, its false religions, its system of governments and economies, and its social customs.

1 . Is Satan the prince of the power of the air? Eph. 2:2.

COMMENT: As prince of the power of the air, Satan broadcasts his attitudes of selfishness and vanity, of competition and strife. Satan's broadcasting can be compared to television and radio broadcasting. For example, your radio picks up the electromagnetic waves that radiate from the transmitters of various radio stations. The human mind can pick up Satan's "broadcasts" because the human spirit in each individual is "in tune" with the devil's spiritual "wavelength"!

When Adam made his decision in the Garden of Eden, he rejected God, the Spirit of God and immortal life. The human spirit in Adam became "tuned in" to Satan's spiritual wavelength from the time he first disobeyed God. And his descendants throughout time and into this 21st century are still tuned in to Satan's wavelength.

2. When Adam made the decision to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, did God then close up the Holy Spirit from Adam and his descendants? Gen. 3:23-24.

COMMENT: God would not allow Adam to eat of the fruit of the tree of life after he sinned. The Holy Spirit was cut off from mankind until God made it available again through Christ, the second Adam-but then only to those God would call into His Church, which began on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 31, and which has continued down through the centuries to this very day. The Holy Spirit will not be poured out on all mankind until after Jesus Christ returns (see Joel 2:28). Future lessons of the Church of God Bible Correspondence Course will fully explain God's Master Plan of salvation for all of humanity.

## **THE REAL PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH**

1. When did the God Family decree that Jesus Christ, the second Adam, would come and pay the penalty of the sins of humanity? Rev. 13:8, last part.

COMMENT: Christ was the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world [ of Satan]"-that is, it was decreed at the time Adam made the wrong decision that the Lamb of God should die for the sins of all mankind.

2. But before Christ could fulfill His mission on earth, did He have to qualify to take over the throne of the earth? Matt. 4:1 -11.

COMMENT: Jesus qualified to replace Satan as earth's ruler by overcoming him. He resisted the temptations of the devil after having fasted 40 days and 40 nights.

3. After qualifying to replace Satan as world ruler, did Jesus then begin preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God? Mark 1:13-15. Did He also call disciples so He could teach them personally? Mark 1: 16-20; 3:14.

COMMENT: Jesus called His 12 disciples before He started the New Testament Church of God. A disciple is a student or learner. Christ chose them - they didn't choose Him. He told Simon (Peter) and Andrew his brother: "Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men."

Jesus taught and trained the 12 disciples so they could become teachers-so He could start the Church around them. The apostles would form part of the foundation of the Church. They would be the teachers of those God would call into His Church later.

But none became members of the Church until after Jesus had ascended into heaven. Rather, He first called the disciples. Jesus Himself taught them so they could become teachers and members, upon their spiritual conversion. When Jesus did start the Church, He already had trained teachers.

4. Can "whosoever will" now receive God's Holy Spirit and thereby become a member of God's Church? John 6:44, 65.

COMMENT: No man can come to Christ-except the Spirit of the Father draws him. God the Father calls people to Christ and repentance (Rom. 2:4; 2 Tim. 2:25). And the disciples were called and trained so they could teach others God would call into His Church.

5. On the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was made available to those God calls into His Church, how many had God already called? Acts 1:15; 2:1-4. How many did God add to the Church later that same day? Acts 2:41. Did God also add others to the Church daily? Verse 47.

COMMENT: About 120 became members of God's Church on the day of Pentecost, A.D, 31, when they were begotten by the Holy Spirit. Another 3,000 were begotten of God later that same day. They were taught by the apostles. During the time of the apostles, the number of converted members continued to multiply and may have eventually increased to a hundred thousand or so.

Jesus Christ will not establish the Kingdom of God on earth until many more have been called and taught to become teachers.

6. Will the kingdoms (governments) of this world be ruled by saints in the World Tomorrow? Dan. 7-18. 22, 27; Rev. 2:26-27;15:10; 20:4.

COMMENT: The Church is the Kingdom of God in "embryo" - not yet born, The members are the Spirit-begotten children of the World Tomorrow! Jesus came to start a new world-a new civilization-through them. They will help Him rule and teach His way of life when He returns. Church members are now in training so they can teach the millions and even billions during the Millennium and the Great White Throne Judgment period!

Those who are in God's Church are now being taught how to live. They're being taught the way to build a right society and a right civilization that will be both happy and productive. In the new civilization everybody will cooperate with one another. Everyone will be at peace and will truly enjoy life to the full! Tomorrow's world will have none of the troubles of Satan's world today.

7. Does God "test" or "try" those who are in training to become tomorrow's teachers, to determine if they will continue to obey the government of God as Abraham did (Gen. 22:5)? Ps. 11:4-5; Jer. 17:10; I Pet. 4:12-13; Jas. 1:2-4.

COMMENT: Those in God's Church had to make a decision as Adam did. They, too, had to decide whether or not they would obey God. Then, as they continue to live God's way, they are tried and tested so God will know that the "heart" of each member is truly turned to Him before his or her birth into the Family of God.

8. What did Christ command Peter, who was to become the leading apostle of the early Church? John 21:15-17.

COMMENT: God's Church today also follows Jesus' command to "feed my sheep." The Church has an educational program to teach the Spirit-begotten children of God. This is accomplished through the teaching of members by God's ministers in weekly Sabbath services and through the Church's publications. The Church of God publishes numerous booklets and this Bible correspondence course you are using in this study of the Bible.

These are the major means by which the Church teaches ("feeds") its members those who have been called into God's Church to become students so they can be taught before they can teach others. God is now, through His Church, teaching future teachers to teach the rest of mankind!

The real and awesome purpose of God's Church is to produce teachers of millions and eventually billions' of people in the World Tomorrow so everyone will learn the way to become Spirit-born members of the God Family!

9. In the meantime, did God also command His Church to preach His truth to the world? Matt. 28:19-20. Did Jesus prophesy that the Gospel of the Kingdom of God would be proclaimed to the world as a witness before the end of Satan's world and the ushering in of the World Tomorrow? Matt. 24:3, 14; Mark 13:10.

COMMENT: The Church's preaching and publishing of Christ's Gospel to the world is the primary means by which God calls various ones into His Church to be trained. To those millions who hear it, but whom God is not calling at this time, it is merely a witness.

## **THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH**

How and when did Jesus Christ begin the Church of God? In a sense, He started it long ago through the prophets of the Old Testament era. The prophets, together with Jesus and His apostles, constitute the foundation of the spiritual House of God, which is now being built by Christ. Let's understand.

1. Did Jesus say He would build His Church? Matt. 16:18.

COMMENT: This is the first place in the Bible where the word church is used. It is translated from the Greek word ekklesia and means "called-out ones" - from ek (out), and klesia (called). The Greek word means "a calling out" to meet together, especially as a religious congregation. It does not mean a building, as commonly assumed today.

2. What had to occur before the New Testament Church could be founded? John 7:37-39.

COMMENT: The Church could not be founded until Jesus had ascended to heaven and the Holy Spirit was sent to spiritually beget those the Father had called. Nevertheless, God long ago began calling out a few to form part of the foundation of the Church, namely Abraham and the other prophets. This undoubtedly even included Abel, Enoch and Noah, for these righteous men were used by God to play some part in preparing for the future ruling Kingdom of God.

Thus the Eternal began laying the actual foundation of His Church through the prophets Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Through the years from Abraham until Christ, God called His prophets out of Satan's world to be a part of the foundation of the Church of God.

3. What were the apostles to form along with the prophets? Eph. 2:19-22, especially verse 20. Who is the Head of the Church? Eph. 5:23.

COMMENT: During the three-and-one-half years of Jesus' earthly ministry, He called out twelve apostles who would also be a part of the foundation of the Church. Christ taught and trained them as His proceeded to do the work of God.

Jesus thus built His Church on the foundation of the apostles and the Old Testament prophets, with Jesus Himself being the Head of the Church-the "Chief Cornerstone" of the spiritual Temple of God.

4. After having trained the 12 apostles, when did Jesus actually start the Church? Acts 2:1-4.

COMMENT: The New Testament Church was founded on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 31, when about 120 were begotten by God's Holy Spirit. And it is by God's Spirit, which resided in all the prophets, apostles and other Church brethren, that they shall be resurrected (or changed, if still alive) to immortality at Christ's Second Coming in power and glory!

Thus the Church - the Kingdom of God in "embryo" - is composed of the very first of all humans who shall be born into the Kingdom of God as God Beings!

5. To administer the various operations of the Church, what spiritual offices has God set in the Church under Christ? Eph. 4:11-12.

COMMENT: An apostle is "one sent forth" by God with Christ's Gospel message of the coming Kingdom of God.

The prophets set in the foundation of the Church are those of the Old Testament era, whose writings were used to form a considerable part of New Testament teaching and functioning. The word "prophesy" is often used in the sense of "to preach, or proclaim." So some of the preachers in God's Church might well be termed "prophets".

Evangelists in Paul's day were leading ministers proclaiming the Gospel to the public, raising up local churches and having supervision over some churches. Pastors are ministers placed over a local church or group of local churches.

In the early New Testament Church there were also teachers who were not necessarily preachers. Yet all ministers and teachers are called elders in other New Testament passages.

6. Do members of the body of Christ decide for themselves what they want to believe, or have they received their beliefs and doctrines from the apostles of Jesus Christ who, along with the Old Testament prophets, are part of the very foundation of God's New Testament Church? Acts 2:42; Eph. 2:20. Where did Christ's apostles get their doctrines? Matt. 28:18-20.

COMMENT: The early New Testament Church received its beliefs, teachings and customs from the apostles who had been taught by Christ personally. (included were the writings of the Old Testament prophets, as mentioned before.) Thus the individuals in the early Church did not decide doctrine for themselves, nor did they individually receive the truth from Christ. Christ taught the apostles and He held them responsible for teaching the doctrines to the Church.

7. What did God, through the Apostle Paul, instruct the Church to speak? I Cor. 1:10.

COMMENT: God's Word states that all the members of the body of Christ must "speak the same thing". In other words, there must be no division in what is believed, taught or preached. God's Church cannot be divided! Therefore, individual members of the body of Christ today continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrines - just as the early New Testament Christians did.

## **FUNCTION OF THE INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS**

1. Is God's Church made up of those individual members who are a part of the "body of Christ"? I Cor. 12:27. Does the Church have many members, as does the human body? Verses 12-14. Is each member important within the one body? Verses 18-25.

COMMENT: We have seen that the Church is made up of the Spirit-begotten children of God whom the Father has called out of the world. It is the "body of Christ." It is the organized spiritual

organism-the affianced bride of Christ, which shall be married to Him after those composing the Church are changed to immortality.

With the help of God's Holy Spirit, the individual members of the Church are overcoming Satan, the world and their own carnal natures. They are developing the holy, righteous character of God. Thus they are qualifying to sit with Christ on the throne of His worldwide government-to help Him rule and teach the nations.

But what specific functions do the members serve in the Church today?

As we have learned, the proclaiming of the good news of the coming Kingdom of God and "feeding" the membership is a twofold function of the Church.

The individual lay member has a vital part in one of these functions: proclaiming the Gospel to the world. All the various members whom God has set in His Church are interdependent-mutually dependent on one another. They form a TEAM-an organized spiritual organism-utterly different from any secular and worldly organization!

How, more specifically, does this mutual dependency operate?

Without the generous freewill offerings of the lay members, the Church's commission could not be fulfilled in today's world!

Also, without the fervent and prevailing, continual PRAYERS of the members, the work of God's Church would not be accomplished. And without the continual ENCOURAGEMENT of lay members, the ministry could not bear up under the persecutions, oppositions and trials of doing God's end-time work!

Conversely, the lay members need just as urgently the encouragement, teaching, counseling and leadership of local pastors. How beautiful is the organized teamwork in God's Church!

### **THE CHURCH AS SPIRITUAL "MOTHER"**

God reveals that His Church is the spiritual "mother" of Spirit-begotten Christians. They are spiritual "embryos" and "fetuses"-already children of God, but as yet unborn because they are still growing spiritually after having been begotten by God's Holy Spirit. The Church is thus God's spiritual organism for feeding with spiritual food and training and developing in righteous character the future Spirit-born children of God the Father!

Let's fully understand this wonderful truth. Let's see how human reproduction pictures spiritual reproduction, and learn exactly what part God's Church plays in developing future members of the divine Family of God,

Human begetting, the period of gestation and then finally birth are types of spiritual reproduction--of being born into the God Family. Human reproduction pictures spiritual salvation.

All human life begins as a tiny egg-called an ovum-produced inside the human mother. But this ovum has a very limited life. Some doctors and scientists believe it has a life span of approximately 24 hours, unless fertilized by a sperm cell produced in the body of the human father. Upon entering the ovum, the sperm finds its way to and joins with the ovum nucleus. This begins the development of a new human being.

But it is not yet a born human being. Human life has merely been begotten. For the first few months it is called an embryo. Then, until birth, it is called a foetus.

The newly-begotten embryo must be fed and nourished with physical food through the mother. As a result of this physical nourishment it grows, and grows and GROWS-until it is ready to be born, normally after nine months.

Now notice the amazing comparison between human reproduction and spiritual reproduction.

A human has to be begotten by a human father. And to be born of God-as a God Being in the Family of God-one must first be begotten by the spiritual Father-Almighty God! Let's grasp this amazing truth.

1. Does the Spirit of God impart God's divine life and nature to a person when he is begotten by God the Father? 2 Pet. 1:4. But how much of God's Spirit does one receive when spiritually begotten? 2 Cor. 5:5. Is one so begotten a literal child of God? Rom. 8:16; 1 John 3:1-2.

COMMENT- By analogy each adult human life can be compared to an "egg" or "ovum." This "ovum" has a limited life span--an average of about 70 years - very short compared to eternal life. But spiritual, divine, immortal life may be imparted to it by God the Father.

As the physical male sperm finds its way to and unites with the nucleus in the ovum, so God's Spirit enters and combines with the human spirit in man! This happens upon receipt of the Holy Spirit-after real repentance, baptism and the laying on of hands of a true minister of God

One thus begotten by the Spirit of God is now a "babe in Christ" (I Cor. 3:1). He is already a child of God, though yet unborn. By direct analogy the embryo in a mother's womb is already the child of its parents, though not yet born.

A Spirit-begotten child of God now has the presence of eternal life--God life --through God's Spirit, but he is not yet an immortal spirit being--not yet born of God--not yet an inheritor and possessor. He is merely an "heir" with Christ (Rom. 8:17). The divine life of God has merely been begotten.

This divine life and character starts so very small in one it is doubtful if much of it is in evidence--except for the glow of that ecstasy of spiritual "romance" one may radiate in that "first love" of conversion, spiritually speaking. But so far as spiritual knowledge and developed righteous character goes, there is not much -- yet.

Once spiritually begotten we are merely a spiritual "embryo." Now we must be fed and nourished on spiritual food so we can grow spiritually! Jesus said man shall not live by bread (physical food) alone, but by every word of God (spiritual food)! This we take in from the Bible. Our spiritual growth and development of God's righteous character also comes through personal, intimate, daily contact with God through prayer, and through Christian fellowship with other Spirit-begotten children in God's Church. And also by the teaching imparted by the Church!

2. What is God's Church --"Jerusalem above"- called in Galatians 4:26?

COMMENT: Beginning with verse 22 of Galatians chapter 4 is an allegory about the two covenants --the Old Covenant (made with ancient Israel at Mt. Sinai, and the New Covenant to be made with Christ's spiritual Church at His return, as we learned in Lesson 17. In this allegory the Church is called "the mother of us all"-that is, of those in the Church of God.

Notice the parallel of spiritual reproduction with human reproduction! The Church is the spiritual "mother" of its members--just as a human mother is the mother of her begotten, but unborn child, and the physical embryo is fed physically through the mother.

3. Has God set His called and chosen ministers in His Church to nourish the members so they will grow spiritually? I Pet. 5:1-3; Eph. 4:11-13.

COMMENT: The human mother carries her unborn baby in that part of her body where she can best protect it from physical harm; and that protection is part of her function, as well as to nourish the unborn child. Likewise, the Church, through Christ's ministers, spiritually nourishes--instructs, teaches, counsels, advises--and protects the unborn children of God from the spiritual harm of false ministers and false doctrines!

4. As the physical embryo and then foetus must grow physically until it is developed enough to be born, must the Spirit-begotten Christian also grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ?

2 Pet. 3:18. Must he overcome and develop in spiritual character during this life in order to be born into the Kingdom of God? Rev. 21:7.

COMMENT: As the physical embryo gradually develops the organs, features, and characteristics of a human being, even so the Spirit-begotten Christian must gradually develop the righteous character of God - love, faith, patience, gentleness, temperance, etc. (Gal. 5:22-23). He or she does so by living by -

being a doer of-the Word of God! And it is the function of the Church-as the spiritual "mother" of Christians-to help them develop the holy, righteous and perfect character of God.

Then, in God's due time, by a resurrection or by instantaneous change to immortality at Christ's coming (Rom. 8:11; I Cor. 15:49-53; 1 Thess. 4:16-17), the begotten child of God shall be born of God-enter into the Kingdom or Family of God!

5. Will one thus born again be composed of spirit, even as God is spirit? John 3:5-8; 4:24.

COMMENT: How wonderfully human reproduction pictures spiritual reproduction in God's Family! Yet, by his deceptions, Satan has blinded humanity to the fact that we may be born as spirit-composed individuals-as part of that divine Family-as part of the God Kingdom, of which the Church is now in embryonic form!