

THE GOOD NEWS FOR LAODICEA

*Study Guide Nine***Why There Is Hope for the Organized Church**

This is perhaps the most serious of all the topics we have studied in this series. Millions of people say that they like Jesus and the like the Bible, but they have no use for “organized religion.” We now face a vegetarian version of this idea within the remnant church. Some Seventh-day Adventists say that they like the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy writings, but they are very doubtful about the “organized church.”

We hear some openly declare the church to be Babylon in defiance of Ellen White’s clear testimony to the contrary (cf. *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 32-62). To them church membership is unimportant. They believe that the Lord has forsaken the organized church. Such usually gravitate into off-shoots that solicit or gladly accept financial support. Few show a burden for proclaiming the gospel to the world, but are absorbed in making sure that *they* will be saved when probation closes. Others believe that God has called them to proclaim “the third angel’s message” publicly without the fellowship, counsel, or cooperation of the organized church.

Is the organized church a vessel that is doomed to sink? Should “faithful souls” abandon ship and jump in the cold water on their own? Will there be no “ship” in the last days? What is the true church? Is the true “remnant” merely a non-cohesive, unorganized scattering of “faithful souls”?

The most casual observer will surely agree that we have come to “perilous times.” What is our duty now? What is the “mind” of Christ toward the organized Seventh-day Adventist Church? If we can determine the answer to that question, we can immediately know what our “mind” toward it should be.

What the Bible Says About Church Organization

1. What is the heart of the everlasting or new covenant the Lord made with Abraham long ago? Genesis 12:3, 7; 17:7, 21.

Note: With Abraham the Lord began to organize His people on earth to be a denominated, visible “family.” The purpose was that they might be His evangelistic witnesses, soul-winners in the world. Abraham’s “seed” was elected to be the ancient equivalent of the organized church because his descendants were to share and exemplify his faith.

2. Did Israel’s or Judah’s terrible apostasy in the days of Elijah and Jeremiah cancel that election of God? 1 Kings 18:36, 37; Jeremiah 31:31-37.

Note: Although they were terribly punished for their apostasies (especially Baal-worship), neither Israel nor Judah ever became *Babylon*. Even while they were captives *in* Babylon they remained His Israelite witnesses. Daniel and his companions accomplished what the kings and priests of Judah had failed to do. At the nadir of Judah's terrible unfaithfulness to God, when the prospects for reformation seemed darkest, Jeremiah bought land at Anathoth, demonstrating his faith in the future healing of Judah's apostasy (cf. Jeremiah 32).

3. What happened to this divine election when the Jews finally crucified Christ, and rejected His apostles in 34 A. D.? Daniel 9:24; Matthew 21: 42-45; Luke 20:16; Acts 13:46; Romans 9:7,8; 11:17, 25-27.

Note: From the beginning, Abraham's *true* "seed" were not his fleshly descendants but those who had his faith. Not in Ishmael but "in Isaac shall thy seed be called" (Romans 9:7)., Righteousness by faith was as true in Abraham's day as in Paul's. In 34 A. D. the physical nation and race of Israel were rejected, but the true descendants of Abraham were demonstrated as those who had faith in Christ (Galatians 3:29). These now became the church, the new "nation bringing forth the fruits." The church was not an appendage or off-shoot from Israel; *it was the true Israel*.

4. How was the church "built" or organized by Christ? Matthew 16:18, 19; Mark 3:13-15; John 20:21-23.

Note: "He ordained twelve.'....The first step was now to be taken in the organization of the church that after Christ's departure was to be His representative on earth." (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 291).

5. How did the early apostles continue to organize His church? Acts 13:1-4; Titus 1:5-11.

6. What is the underlying principle of church organization? 1 Corinthians 12:7-28; Ephesians 4:8-16

Note: Paul's brilliant idea is inspired. The church is like a human body. Christ is the head, and each believer is a "member of the body." A body is not an uncoordinated, scattered melange of disorganized organs, an eye here and a nose over there, and a stomach somewhere else. The early church functioned as a body in disciplined inter-relationship under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. When Saul of Tarsus was converted, the Lord brought him into immediate fellowship with His organized church (Acts 9:10-19; see also *Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 122, 163).

We are told that “faithful souls” have always constituted the true church (*ibid.*, p. 11). But that church is by no means disorganized. When used to imply that the organized church cannot be the true one, that statement is wrested from its context.

7. Was the church organized during the Dark Ages period of persecution? Revelation 2:18-27; 12:6.

“There existed for many centuries *bodies of Christians* who remained almost wholly free from papal corruption....The Vaudois churches, in their purity and simplicity, resembled the church of apostolic times.” (*The Great Controversy*, pp. 63, 69). The church in the wilderness was “the woman,” that is, a coordinated body of believers in Christ. His complaint against the church of Thyatira was that they were not intra-disciplined enough—they permitted “Jezebel” to teach in their midst (Revelation 2:18-20).

The Organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

8. How did the Holy Spirit lead our Seventh-day Adventist pioneers to organize this church? Read Testimonies to Ministers, pp. 26-29.

Note: “We sought the Lord with earnest prayer....Light was given by His Spirit that there must be order and thorough discipline in the church—that organization was essential....Notwithstanding that the Lord gave testimony after testimony upon this point, the opposition was strong, and it had to be met again and again....We engaged in the work of organization, and marked prosperity attended this advanced movement” (*Ibid.*, pp. 26, 27).

8. How did Ellen White identify the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

Note: “In a special sense Seventh-day Adventist have been set in the world as watchmen and light-bearers. To them has been entrusted the last warning for a perishing world,...[the] proclamation of the first, second, and third angels’ messages....The most solemn truths ever entrusted to mortals have been given us to proclaim to the world” (*Testimonies*, Vol. 9, p. 19).

“I am instructed to say to Seventh-day Adventist the world over, God has called us as a people to be a peculiar treasure unto Himself. He has appointed that His church on earth shall stand perfectly united in the Spirit and counsel of the Lord of hosts to the end of time.” (*Selected Messages*, Book 2, p. 397). “Let us have faith that God is going to carry the noble ship which bears the people of God safely into port” (p. 390).

These and other similar statements were made decades after the 1888 experience, indicating that Ellen White still regarded the organized church as the body of Christ, enfeebled and defective as it was and is.

10. What is the mind of Christ toward the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Revelation 1:1; 3:14-21; 10:11; 12:17; 14:12; 19:7-9.

Note: The prophecy calls for a people to be raised up in the last days who fulfill the will of God and bring honor and glory to the Lamb. They will provide a convincing answer to the long-delayed Lord's prayer, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." They are to share executive authority with Christ in the conclusion of the issues of the great controversy. (3:21).

The Lord has denominated that people to be known as Seventh-day Adventist. The dragon's enmity has developed into a highly refined, massive "inside job." Our failures and backslidings have been grievous. Yet the Lord can heal our backslidings (cf. Jeremiah 3:22). To human judgment the church may appear to be a vast graveyard of dry bones without life. But the Lord can bring life to them. "Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep." The Lord has not forgotten this world and its needs. He "is at the head of the work, and He will set everything in order. If matters need adjusting at the head of the work, God will attend to that, and work to right every wrong" (*Idem.*).

However, the Lord needs human agents through whom He can work to "set everything in order." Through union with Christ and close fellowship with Him they will "sit" with Him in His throne and thus share with him the executive authority of working "to right every wrong." They are the true Israel who exercise the faith of Abraham. The patriarch had to learn to have the faith the Lord has, a faith that "quickened the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were" (Romans 4:17). So must we! Where we see only dry bones, we must exercise the faith to "call that which is not as though it were" and thus make possible the Lord's miracle of a new creation, a resurrection from death to spiritual life. Even if there were not even one faithful Seventh-day Adventist in all the world, he who has the faith of Abraham would believe that the prophecies of Revelation concerning the remnant church must be fulfilled. He would cooperate with the Lord's work of resurrecting the dry bones.

No one can follow Christ without taking up his own cross on which self is crucified with Him. Our church membership is five million; very well, the Lord needs five million agents through whom He can work to bring revival, repentance, reformation, "to right every wrong." He needs five million Elijahs who will lovingly yet firmly stand for the right within the church though the heavens fall, five million who have received that *agape* which casteth out fear.

11. Will the past history of apostasy and failure in Israel always repeat itself? Daniel 8:14; Revelation 11:15; 19:7, 8.

Note: If the answer is yes, we face nothing but hopeless despair in the future. Even if a pure and holy off-shoot should develop, for God to be fair He must give it time also to grow big and wealthy and succumb to temptation and fail as have all righteous movements in the past. If the cycle of failure and apostasy in the organized church is endless, all "reformers" and their institutions are doomed to ultimate failure. But this is not Bible truth; it is not "present truth."

The foundation text of the Seventh-day Adventist Church declares that for once in history, history will not be repeated: "*Then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.*" That has never before happened in history. In order for the heavenly sanctuary to be cleansed, the Lord's sanctuary on earth must also be cleansed.

The One who will accomplish that amazing task is the High Priest of the heavenly sanctuary. Make sure that you spend your lifetime energies in cooperation with Him.