

THE CHURCH: HOW DOES ONE BECOME A MEMBER?

We have been discussing the church Jesus promised to build (Matthew 16:18), the church of God's New Covenant, according to Hebrews 12:22-24.

We have seen that it is a spiritual household consisting of those God has called out of the darkness of sin and into the marvelous fellowship of the light of his word (I Peter 2:5, 9-10). Thus, according to this passage, its members are a holy priesthood enabled to offer spiritual sacrifice to God through Jesus Christ. They are God's chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, his own special people—all predicated on God's mercy.

From Paul's letter to the Christians in Ephesus, we have also seen that this church is the body of Christ and the fullness of him (1:22-23). It is the body in which Jew and Gentile are reconciled to one another and, in that singleness of relationship, reconciled to God (2:11-16). It is the fulfillment of God's plan in the gospel (3:1-6) and, in God's plan, eternal (3:1-6, 21). Further, it is unique: there is but one such body (4:4). It is the body of believers Jesus will save, the bride he has betrothed to himself (5:23, 25-27).

And, finally, in figurative terms adapted from the Old Testament by the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, we have observed that this church is, "...the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" (12:22). Literally, it is "...the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven..." (12:23). It is the cherished relationship with God enjoyed by those who enter the New Covenant in Jesus Christ—those cleansed from sin by his blood within the terms of that covenant (12:24).

Hopefully, one looking at this description of the church who is already included in its number will step back and say, "Wow, how blessed I am to be a part of this!"

And, hopefully, one whose name is not yet included in this number is saying, "Wow," and asking, "What must I do to become a member?"

Negatively, since the church is not an organization, one doesn't become a member of it by joining it, as in joining a club.

Positively, since the church consists of those saved from sin, becoming a member of it is as simple, but as vital, as obeying the gospel to be saved (Acts 2, especially verses 37-38, 41, 47).

Is it really this simple? Look for our next article.