

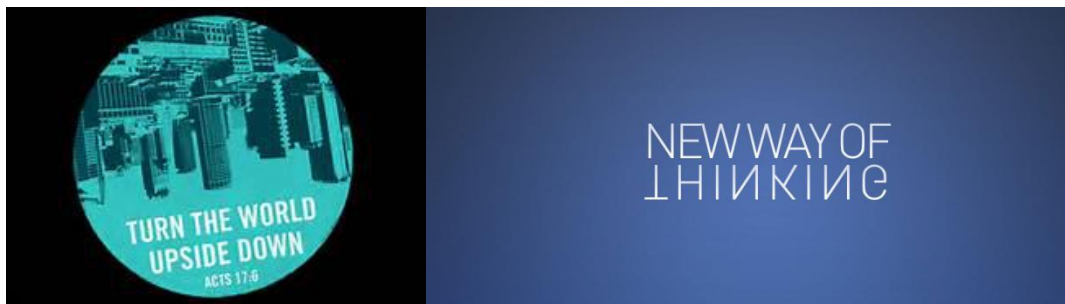
RELATIONSHIP AND RELIGION



Q: How many religious congregations are there in the United States?

A: There is no official directory for all the congregations in the country, so sociologists of religion have to rely on statistical estimates extrapolated from surveys. These are often disputed, and to complicate matters, thousands of new churches open each year, while thousands of others close. Hartford Institute estimates there are roughly 350,000 religious congregations in the United States. This estimate relies on the RCMS 2010 religious congregations census. Of those, about 314,000 are Protestant and other Christian churches, and 24,000 are Catholic and Orthodox churches. Non-Christian religious congregations are estimated at about 12,000.

With so many church choices how does a person make a decision? Should I have to make a decision at all? What does the Bible say? What did Jesus do?



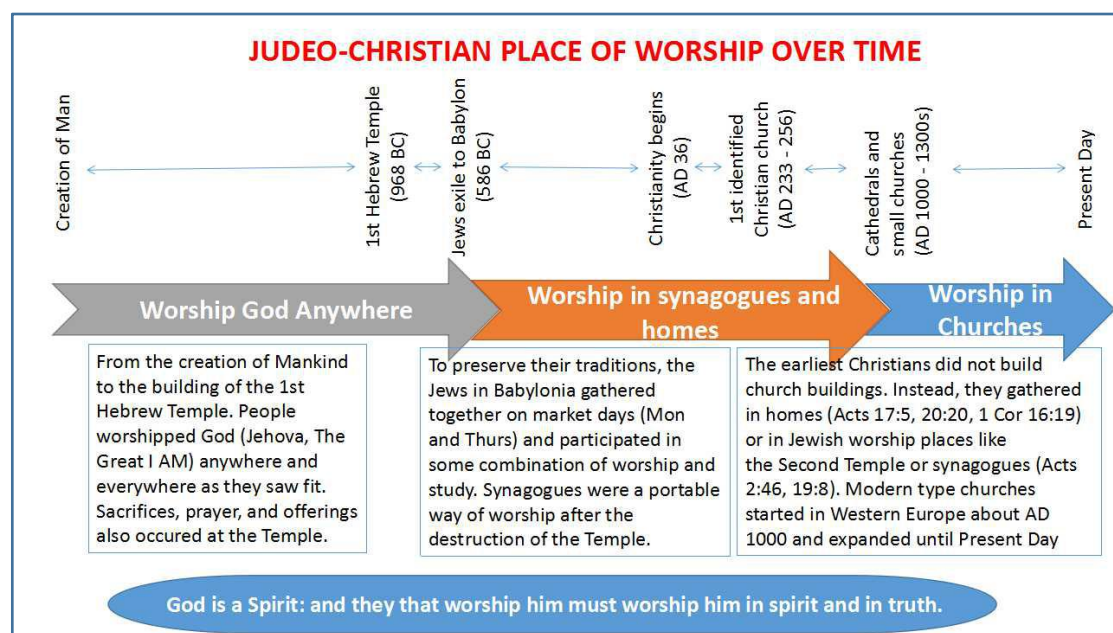
As a child I often wondered why there were so many Christian churches but **only One God**....and I wondered why they were all so different and why they all seemed to compete against each other for members.....and I never understood the need to defend my church or sect verses another sects of supposedly the same "**One Faith**". I also saw as a child many liquor stores all over the city.....and the patron who bought vodka or bourbon in one store was not afraid to get the same product in another liquor store and was happy to do so.....and it saddened me that churches within a block of each other never had any fellowship together.....for fear of some kind of **unity** that could form and negate the need for one church or the other. And what is extremely sad is that I am no longer a kid, but this mentality is still the same among many Christian congregations. Brothers and Sisters it is time for a new way of thinking and new actions. It is time for all believers to understand our role in the **Body of Christ** which is **the only Church**.

A house divided against itself cannot stand (Matthew 12:25).

From the beginning God has always wanted a **Relationship** in the hearts of Mankind. We were created for fellowship with his only begotten son Jesus (*Colossians 1:16*). And when asked which are the greatest commands in the scriptures:

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. Matthew 22:37-40

Those who profess to believe in Jesus should understand that the entire bible explains the 2 commands on **Relationships**.....with God....and each other. Both commands emphasize **Love**....**Love** is essential and non-negotiable for believers.....because **God is Love**....and because we are His, we also must be **Love**. **Love** is a lifestyle that we cannot comprehend easily. Thus believers require examples, study, prayer, and fellowship to mature in **Love**. Jesus came to fulfill and demonstrate God's word of **Love**. **Love** is what **our faith** should be all about. But over time many have emphasized "church" and "religion" over **Love**.



And as God's words were given over time, there were many who tried to comprehend God's **Love** and **Relationships** and many worshiped Him throughout the ages. But from the beginning worship did not occur as it does today.

In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?" 2 Samuel 7:7 (ESV)

The people of God must first understand who God is, **The Great I Am**,....He is **The Creator** of the Whole Universe and Heaven....He is **The One** who created **something out nothing**....He is a **Spirit Being** that exists from everlasting to everlasting....**His**

Presence is Everywhere in Heaven and the Universe. So when King David, who was well meaning, wanted to build God a house to live in, God asked the question 'did I ever ask anyone to build me a house to dwell in'.



God Dwells
Inside of Us!



God desires to dwell in the hearts of mankind. Because God is everywhere at all times, He can be worshiped everywhere and at all times. Believers should **revere God in ALL places** just as we would at a church. And although churches provide a forum for consistency in learning about **Relationships**, believers are **not confined** to worshiping God in **one place**. **God desires a 24/7 Relationship**....not one where we only meet him a couple times a week in a designated building which is the assumption of many believers.

What did Jesus do? Which Church did He belong to? Where did he minister?

- It is not found in the bible that Jesus was member of any church, yet Jesus had a custom to attend a synagogue on the Sabbath to read and discuss scripture. (Luke 4:16)

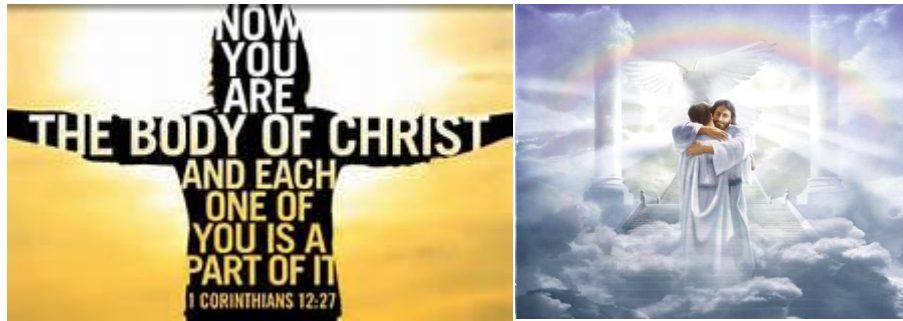
- Jesus greatest sermons were preached and miracles performed outside; on the mountain, in the wilderness, by the sea. (Matthew 5; Matthew 14; Luke 5)



At one point in my life, I decided to compete in a Triathlon (Swim, Bike, Run). I had run most of my life and I had swam and biked casually as a child. It didn't take me long to realize that I had no clue of how to train and compete for these events; so I joined a Swim and Triathlete Club. We had the opportunity to meet several times per week to practice these events and discuss strategy that could improve our performance in competitions. Attendance was not mandatory. But because we all had a common goal to maintain or improve in 'real world' competition, we gladly attended the practices and strategy fellowship with teammates and coaches within our club. Medals were only earned by those who finished 'real world' competition.

And it is with this same enthusiasm that we should enter our places of 'God worship' with other members of the **Body of Christ**. We should be eager to learn, praise, fellowship, and grow together with other believers **from any congregation worldwide** because we are all on the **same team** with the **same goal**. And we should

leave our places of 'God worship' energized to **produce spiritual fruit**. Let us remember that fans don't come to a game to watch teams in the huddle. The game is played outside the huddle on the fields, tracks, and courts.



We have much to discuss and celebrate at our place of worship but most of the work is executed outside just as Jesus did. So believers should focus on nurturing a **Relationship** with the **Creator God** because this is **His will**. Religious rituals without a Relationship with the Creator God is meaningless. And when we are thoroughly energized by the our Relationship with God, We will turn the World Upside down (Act 17:6). **Medals are only earned by those who finish 'real world' spiritual work.**

ONE LOVE, ONE FAITH, ONE HOPE, ONE CHURCH.