

## “Who concerning the Truth Have Misaimed” — 2 Timothy 2:18

### Misaiming concerning the Church

**Misaiming:** “The Bible tells us that ‘those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing’ (Ps. 92:13-14, NKJV). In this passage, the will of the Lord for His people is clearly stated. It is for them to be *planted* in His house—to have roots in a particular local church...

“Since the church is ‘a calling out’ or ‘the called out ones,’ then know that God is calling you out of *your* house in order to be planted in *His* house...

“But God doesn’t want us to go to just any church. He has already chosen a place for us, and He will reveal to every believer the local church He wants him or her to be planted in.

“Why? Because He knows exactly what each of us needs to be able to grow and develop spiritually. Often we think we know better than the Lord what we need. However, Jesus said that the ‘Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him’ (Matt. 6:8).

“If the Father knows what we need, then He knows what local church will meet our needs. As we are planted in *that* place, we will grow, mature and develop spiritually” (Robert Gay, “From a Pastor’s Heart,” *Charisma*, February 2005, p. 46).

**Truth:** The focus of this teaching concerning being planted in a local church cannot be fully appreciated if only the article from which it comes is considered. Rather, it follows a lengthy cover story in the same magazine, entitled, “When Christians Quit Church,” which examines the social phenomenon of believers who are “dropping out” of traditional services but who, at least in their mind, remain committed to a spiritual pursuit of the Lord. The main article notes, “These stayaway saints are not just Bedside Baptists of the old joke. The movement transcends denominations and is as likely to include in its number Pillowtop Pentecostals, Comforter Charismatics or Eiderdown Evangelicals” (34). Following this sociological investigation of the “stayaway” trend, a second article, which contains the above word from a pastor’s heart, is offered to encour-

age believers to be planted in a particular local church, a physical house of the Lord, that He has specifically chosen according to His knowledge of their needs so that they can grow and mature spiritually.

For all the seeming sincerity of concern for the believers’ growth and maturity, the real aim of this word is apparently to help stem the decline of membership in the many so-called churches. And what better way than relying upon a superficial application and self-serving twisting of verses from the Bible to point out that we should be “planted” in a particular local church? In the course of this twisting, the spiritual nature of the church is obscured, the incorporated expression of the church is missed, the narcissistic needs of the believers are elevated above the will of God, and worst of all, our Father is represented as condoning division. Given these lurking errors, there is no possibility for genuine growth and maturity. When our god is our stomach, that is, our needs, and when our glory is really shame because we have been encouraged to set our minds on the things of the earth, the end can only be destruction (Phil. 3:19). The only spirituality that can come from following this advice will be false and hypocritical, like the spirituality of the Pharisees who trumpet their needs in public and whose only reward is in this age (Matt. 6:5). This is a high price for a pastor to ask those under his care to pay in order to maintain denominational and organizational structures that are an affront to God, who wants His people to be planted only in Himself.

This misaiming perverts a proper understanding of the biblical revelation of the nature of the church. Perhaps this effort originates in the author’s desire to provide a rationale for encouraging believers to remain within the organizational sphere of Christendom. It also may simply arise out of a lack of revelation concerning the church. To the author, a local church seems to be not much more than a physical structure, a “place” for us to be planted. Like our physical house, the church is God’s physical house. As such, it is a place that He has chosen for us. This depiction of the church, which utilizes the Bible for the base gain of membership retention (Titus 1:11), is nothing more than a glamorized portrayal of the age-old children’s finger game: “Here is the church, and here is the steeple; open the

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door, and see all the people.” According to the Bible, however, the church is not a building made with hands; it is the gathering of the called-out ones, who through faith have believed into Christ and been incorporated into the Triune God as the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 1:2, 9; Eph. 1:22-23). This gathering place is not a physical building but God Himself (John 17:21). In a time when more and more believers are coming to understand the biblical nature of the church and even long for true local expressions of it, it is rather startling to think that a truly seeking believer would be convinced in any way by this antiquated and misaimed teaching to remain in a dead situation in a dead place.

By missing the truth of the nature of the church completely, the writer also misses an understanding of the incorporated expression of the church. As indicated in John 17:21 and 14:20, the place of our abode is the Father. Through Christ we have access in one Spirit unto the Father (Eph. 2:18). The Father is the destination of our calling, but we reach this destination by being incorporated into Him. This also indicates that the believers, in addition to being incorporated into the Triune God, have become members of the Body of Christ. In the Body, we are members one of another (1 Cor. 12:12, 18, 20; Rom. 12:5), not of an organization composed of a limited group of people with similar “needs.” Just as the Father is one, the church is one, and the expression of the church in a locality should also be one. It cannot be fragmented into many manifestations of the church of our choice. The inherent divisiveness of organized Christianity is evident to every seeking believer. This divisiveness—which is encouraged in this misaiming—damages our faith, detracts from our Christian testimony, and is deeply offensive to God.

This misaiming is offensive in its depiction of the Father’s catering to our narcissistic “needs” and His subsequent condoning of division. This misaiming builds upon the concept of choosing the church of our choice by “gilding” it with the thought of looking for the church of God’s choice. This puts God in the position of making a divisive choice. The “gilding” looks attractive from the outside; it seems to give a proper deference to God, but it nevertheless strongly implies that God’s choice will be based on our needs. In other words, since we really do not know what we need, we should look for the place not of our choosing but of God’s choosing. In this teaching, our needs are paramount, and God is our servant, catering to our needs. God’s need, however, must always prevail over our narcissistic and self-satisfying needs. We have been called into the fellowship of God’s Son, and in this fellowship only God’s image is expressed and only His dominion is exercised, both personally and corporately. His image

and dominion are applied through the killing work of the cross on all that we are and have. Our needs mean nothing! The cross terminates them all, and it is only as God’s needs are met, through the growth and building up of the church into the corporate God, that we truly find rest. Only the place of His rest, a dwelling place of God in spirit, is the place of our rest (Isa. 66:1; Eph. 2:22).

The suggestion that God is actively working to direct us to many different places in order to meet our many different needs attributes a willingness on His part to tolerate and even promote division. This is deplorable. God hates division. It violates His very nature (4:4-6). Christ is not divided (1 Cor. 1:13). All the believers are members of the Body of Christ, and all the believers in a particular locality should meet as the one local expression of the one universal Body of Christ.

Any organization that caters to our needs violates God’s nature and only holds out the prospect for the fulfillment of the desires of our flesh and of our thoughts by denying at its root the operation of the cross. Such a place cannot expect to flourish under the blessing of God. It may flourish temporarily under the eloquence of a speaker or the liveliness of a worship service, but these blessings come from man, not God, and they will wither as the grass (1 Pet. 1:24). God’s blessing is on the brothers who dwell together in oneness, in the person of His Son (Psa. 133), who are blessed by being incorporated in the Son and in His fellowship. Any “spiritual” growth that comes out of following the advice of this misaiming will be false, no matter how bright it appears.

### Misaiming concerning Learning Christ as the Truth Is in Jesus

**Misaiming:** “Learning Christ from Mary: ...Christ is the supreme Teacher, the revealer and the one revealed. It is not just a question of learning what he taught but of *“learning him”*. In this regard could we have any better teacher than Mary? From the divine standpoint, the Spirit is the interior teacher who leads us to the full truth of Christ (cf. *Jn* 14:26; 15:26; 16:13). But among creatures no one knows Christ better than Mary; no one can introduce us to a profound knowledge of his mystery better than his Mother” (Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II to the Bishops, Clergy and Faithful on the Most Holy Rosary, issued October 2, 2002).

**Truth:** In the introduction to his Apostolic Letter, which speaks of the benefits to be derived from the contemplative aspects associated with the recitation of the rosary, Pope John Paul II wrote,

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The Rosary of the Virgin Mary, which gradually took form in the second millennium under the guidance of the Spirit of God, is a prayer loved by countless Saints and encouraged by the Magisterium. Simple yet profound, it still remains, at the dawn of this third millennium, a prayer of great significance, destined to bring forth a harvest of holiness.

This harvesting of holiness is directly linked to the recitation of the rosary, a formulaic prayer that has no basis in a biblical admonition, albeit it does include portions of the Lord's prayer in Matthew 6:9-13. Since the rosary is suffused with prayers to Mary, including, "Hail Mary, Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now, and at the hour of our death," the papal letter seeks to establish the significance of these entreaties by alluding to Mary's role in helping believers to learn Christ. In the notion of learning Christ, as contained in the heading for Section 14 of the letter, there is a clear allusion to Ephesians 4:20-21, which says, "You did not so learn Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him as the reality is in Jesus."

The New Testament does not speak of learning about Christ in an outward, doctrinal way but of actually learning Christ Himself through an inward, experiential knowing of Him. However, a question remains about how this learning process occurs. Does it occur through the assistance of the recitation of the rosary that is contemplatively linked and assisted by Mary because of her intimate knowledge of the Lord as His mother? Or does it occur through the inner anointing of the Spirit, who has no dependence on or need of a dead believer's assistance—even if she bore the Lord in her womb—to guide us into all the reality (John 16:13)? In speaking of the ability, even the calling, of Christians to learn Christ, the gold contained in the divine revelation is presented, but in speaking of the role of Mary, as one who can "introduce us to a profound knowledge of his mystery," the abominations within the cup of gold are also exposed (Rev. 17:4). Mary's knowledge of the Lord, however intimate, is not needed for any believer to experience and learn Christ; this learning capacity was imparted when Christ Himself was imparted into us at the moment of our believing and regeneration. The One who lived a perfect human life—Christ, not Mary—is now in us as our hope of glory and our life (Col. 1:27; 3:4). And because He is the pneumatic Christ, we have the capacity to learn Him in our daily living in ways that are utterly independent of the rosary. As we open to Him, give Him the preeminence in our daily living, and fellowship with Him, He imparts into us an experiential knowledge of Himself that matches

and reflects the inner reality that was exhibited in His human living on the earth.

Jesus lived a life in which He did everything in God, with God, and for God. God was in His living, and He was one with God. This is what is meant by *the reality is in Jesus*. We, the believers, who are regenerated with Christ as our life and are taught in Him, learn from Him as the reality is in Jesus. (Recovery Version, Eph. 4:21, note 1)

In this misaiming, Christ is seemingly afforded a proper place as "the supreme Teacher, the revealer and the one revealed," but the following sentence, which begins with the phrase *It is not just a question of learning what he taught*, semantically confines His teaching to matters of doctrine. The sentence concludes with the phrase "but of 'learning him'" and builds upon this allusion to deeper knowledge by rhetorically asking, "In this regard could we have any better teacher than Mary?" This subtle contrast clearly gives Mary a role of greater importance in imparting a deeper knowledge of the Lord than the role ascribed to Christ as Teacher. This is an abomination! When the Lord—not Mary—came to the believers on the day of resurrection as the Spirit and breathed into them the Holy Spirit, they were introduced, experientially into the mystery that is the Triune God Himself (John 20:21). It was on that day that believers began to know that He is in the Father, that they are in Him, and that He is in them (14:20). On that day believers did not begin to recite the rosary; they began to learn Christ as the reality is in Jesus.

It is interesting to contrast the words of the apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:20, when he speaks of having learned Christ in the past tense, saying, "You did not so learn Christ," with the words in the introduction of this "apostolic letter," which admit that the rosary "gradually took form in the second millennium." To listen to Paul, one should conclude that the believers were already in the experience of learning Christ; to listen to John Paul II, one should conclude that this intimate learning could not have been possible until much later, that is, until after the gradual development of the rosary, sometime in the second millennium of the church. Which letter should be accepted, and which letter should be rejected? To accept Paul's letter and its consistency with the presentation of the revelation of the mystery throughout the New Testament is to enter into a realm that is truly divine and mystical; to accept the *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* is to enter into a realm of idolatrous worship of Mary and formulaic religiosity.

#### Misaiming concerning the Father's House

**Misaiming:** "We have been invited, every one of us believers, to the most thrilling and mystical seven-year

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sojourn this side of eternity. We are to be the house guests of Almighty God!...Most of us would plan more carefully for a two-week vacation than we have for the seven years we will spend in Jesus' Father's house...The mansions [John 14:2, KJV]...are compared to the honeymoon chambers built by each bridegroom for his bride in ancient Israel...They were constructed to be used only seven days, the length of the Israeli honeymoon, which of course, pertains to our seven years in heaven...We will merely have comfortable places in which to keep ourselves during our short visit to Jesus' Father's house" (Zola Levitt, *In My Father's House*, "an explanation of the incredible seven years we will spend as guests in heaven, in the Messiah's Father's house," 1981, pp. 1, 3).

**Truth:** Zola Levitt, a "Jewish believer thoroughly educated in the synagogues and brought to the Messiah in 1971" (Preface), provides an interesting and novel interpretation of the Lord's word concerning the Father's house in John 14:2, based largely on analogies associated with Jewish weddings and then applied to the rapture, the judgment seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10), and the marriage dinner of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7-9).

The interpretation is interesting in its willingness to draw some distinction between the grossly misaimed notion that occupies the thoughts of most Christians, namely that the Lord is speaking of a physical, luxurious, and even gaudy dwelling place in heaven that He is personally preparing and customizing for us in order to accommodate our every physical and soulish whim and desire for eternity. In referencing Jewish weddings, Levitt points out that the honeymoon mansions of a Jewish couple were, in fact, modest and temporary. They were modest because they served only the short-term purpose of the consummation of a marriage, typically seven days, and they were temporary because they were never intended to be a permanent dwelling place. In contrast to viewing "mansions" as a permanent palace in heaven, Levitt concludes that the Father's house is composed of "comfortable places" suitable for a "short visit" (3). Even though this interpretation downsizes the Father's house, which may be troubling for many Christians who mistakenly yearn for the physical gratification associated with most visions of heaven, it is still built upon an improper understanding of the biblical revelation.

Simply stated, this teaching misaims because the Father's house does not refer to a physical dwelling place that is either gaudy or modest. It refers to the corporate God Himself, who is not only an incorporation by virtue of His coinhering triune being but who also has been incorporated into the believers, who

received the Spirit of reality. The Father's house was prepared by the Lord's going in death and His coming in resurrection, and it is the Lord who is our access into the Father, our mutual dwelling place.

Instead of first looking for interpretational analogies in Jewish tradition for an understanding of the Lord's word concerning the Father's house, we should look at the Lord's clear words themselves. On the evening of His betrayal and crucifixion, the Lord spoke of His going and coming for the preparation of many abodes in His Father's house. He did not speak of these matters, however, in isolation from His intrinsic relationship with the Father but rather as a continuation and consummation of it. The Father's house is where He is and where we will be (John 14:3), which is the Father Himself (v. 6). The Son is in the Father and the Father is in the Son through their eternal coinherence and coexistence (v. 10). By our believing into the crucified and resurrected Lord (vv. 1, 6) the way has been opened for us to be incorporated into Him, and by virtue of this incorporation we become one of the many abodes of the Father in His enlarged house in the Son (vv. 20, 23).

The Lord's word, "that where I am you also may be" (v. 3), does not speak of a temporary, modest, physical dwelling place as Levitt suggests or even of a permanent physical dwelling place in heaven as most Christians hope; rather, it speaks of the eternal coinherence and coexistence of the three of the Trinity. The Son is eternally in the Father, and the Father is eternally in the Son, but through the death and resurrection of Christ, it is now possible for the believers to be similarly in the Father by being in the Son through the coming of the Spirit of reality. The greatness of a palace in heaven or even the modesty of a loving, temporary bridal chamber pales in comparison to this corporate reality. There is nothing temporary about the Father's house, just as there is nothing temporary about the mutual incorporation of the Father in the Son and the Son in the Father.

Levitt's interpretation of the Father's house is also novel in its association of the phrase *My Father's house* with a temporary bridal chamber that the believers will enjoy in heaven during the seven years of the tribulation. In this regard, it strips the term of its eternal implications and relates it entirely to the events of the tribulation, rapture, judgment seat of Christ, and marriage dinner of the Lamb. Drawing upon the Jewish tradition of a seven-day wedding celebration and then linking this with events occurring during the final week (read seven days) of Daniel's seventy weeks, which encompass the above details, Levitt suggests that the many mansions in the Father's house are

really a temporary but modest physical dwelling place where the raptured believers will escape the wrath of the tribulation, be purged of bad deeds at the judgment seat of Christ in a loving way that may be likened to a “honeymoon” of “more troublesome partners” that is not “quite as agreeable as others,” but which “we all seem to come through” since we are “with the one we love” (16-17), and enjoy a marriage dinner prior to our return with Christ to defeat Antichrist at Armageddon. In support of this misaimed interpretation of the Father’s house, the teaching draws upon seven similarities related to Jewish weddings, including a contract (the new covenant), the payment of a price (the Lord’s blood), a cup (the cup of the Lord’s covenant), the departure of the Bridegroom (presumably the Lord’s death), the stealing of the bride (the Lord’s coming as a thief in the night), the bridal chamber (the Father’s house), and the marriage supper (the marriage dinner of the Lamb) (12).

This interpretation, however, cannot be supported by an accurate reading of the Bible or even by an examination of the details of Levitt’s own interpretation of the Bible. In reading the Lord’s word in John 14, we find nothing which indicates that the Father’s house is temporary in nature. Where the Lord is, is where the Lord always was and always will be—in the Father—and when we are brought to the Father, we will be in the Father and He will be in us. Corporately, we will be an eternal abode of the Father through the Son and in the Spirit (Eph. 2:18). We will be dwelling eternally in the corporate God, whether we are in the heavens, immediately prior to the Lord’s return, or whether we are on the new earth, after coming to the new earth as the corporate God, the New Jerusalem.

Because the seven days of a Jewish wedding figure so

prominently in this interpretation and seemingly correspond to Levitt’s pretribulation rapture scenario, he overlooks a critical contradiction between his analogy and the biblical revelation. In speaking of the stealing away of the church, he notes that, according to tradition, “to prevent the young man from literally snatching the girl out of her bed and to give her just a moment or two to prepare herself, the rules were that when he got close enough to her house to be heard, someone in the wedding party had to shout” (16). He associates this tradition with 1 Thessalonians 4:16, saying, “And it is clear from Scripture that the Lord will play the part of the bridegroom, even at the time of the Rapture: ‘For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout...’” (16). The shout of 1 Thessalonians 4:16, however, occurs with the “voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God” when “the dead in Christ will rise first.” The trumpet of God in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 is the last trumpet in 1 Corinthians 15:52, which signals that “the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we will be changed.” As such, the shout and the last trumpet occur near the very end of the last week, not at the beginning. On the matter of timing alone, this interpretation fails to correspond with the Holy Scriptures and should be rejected.

The Father’s house is a great matter in the Bible; it speaks of the believers’ divine and mystical incorporation into the corporate God. It should not be trivialized by the fantasy of a palatial mansion, and it should not be minimized by an attempt to fit it into a timetable associated with events that occur during the last seven years prior to the Lord’s coming back.

*by the Editors*

### Footnote from the Recovery Version of the Bible

“**Paul**, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 1:1).

**Paul:** This book speaks particularly of the church and unveils the church in its seven aspects as (1) the Body of Christ, the fullness, the expression, of the One who fills all in all (v. 23; 4:13); (2) the new man (2:15), a corporate man, having not only the life of Christ but also His person; (3) the kingdom of God (2:19), with the saints as citizens possessing its rights and bearing its responsibilities; (4) the household of God (2:19), a family full of life and enjoyment; (5) the dwelling place of God, in which He may live (2:21-22)—universally, a holy temple in the Lord, and locally, the dwelling place of God in our spirit; (6) the bride, the wife, of Christ (5:24-25) for Christ’s rest and satisfaction; and (7) the warrior (Eph. 6:11-12), a corporate fighter, who deals with and defeats God’s enemy to accomplish God’s eternal purpose. A particular characteristic of this book is that it speaks from the viewpoint of God’s eternal purpose, from eternity, and from the heavenlies. It is positioned in the New Testament immediately after the revelation concerning Christ versus religion (Galatians). It is followed by a book on the practical experience of Christ (Philippians), and it leads to Christ, the Head (Colossians). Thus, these four books are the heart of the New Testament revelation concerning God’s eternal economy.