September 2026

Dear CWR/PTM Friend and Partner,

The visible church is all the people who get together from time to time in God's name. Anybody can find out who they are by going to church to look. The invisible church is all the people God uses for his hands and feet in this world. Nobody can find out who they are except God. Think of them as two circles. The optimist says they are concentric. The cynic says they don't even touch. The realist says they occasionally overlap. – Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking*

Permit me to share a few thoughts, in a two-part series, this month and next (October 2026) about Christianity and the church. One of the most critically important questions a Christ-follower can ask and answer is centered on the distinctions between the visible and invisible church.

Can we know the body of Christ when we see it? Frederick Buechner would say, and I agree, that ***we can clearly see people who "go to" a church building because they and the building are visible, but we cannot see the invisible church, a "congregation" known only to God.*** **Human observation, perception and judgment cannot adequately nor accurately know and define the church.**

The Church – What It Is and Who It Is

Where Christ is, there is his church. Spiritual vision, a gift of God, enables us to know the body of Christ, whether the church is physically visible or invisible, as and when Christ-centered faith is there. When Christ is not in a particular place, then regardless of the claims, the signage outside a brick-and-mortar building or the rhetoric inside it, such a place is not his church.

What is the church? *At times it is a visible* building or congregation… the authentic body of Christ is, *in its totality, always an invisible* (to the naked eye) spiritual institution of grace, mercy and love, wherein Jesus is present and serving all those who seek, surrender to and trust him.

Who is the church? The universal body of Christ is all those who follow him, trust him, believe him and accept him as Lord and Savior.

Merely walking through the front door of a building, or "attending" a building does not a Christian make. It has often been said, rightfully so, one can sit in the barn with the cows, but one will not become a cow simply by walking into and attending a barn.

Being the church, by the grace of God, is far more important than ***going to a building***. Religious brick-and-mortar buildings can be attractive because many feel assured, via their attendance, that God loves them… many feel their prayers are more likely to be heard because they were offered in a religious building… many feel better after "going" to a church building… many feel visible church buildings offer "fellowship" with like-minded people (though spiritual fellowship is not limited to a special building or to any building at all).

Faith is not numbers. Jesus said he was there when two or three were gathered together. Some who attend "big" or "mega" churches with thousands in attendance feel their faith is justified by numbers and some look down their noses at others who attend a "small" church with only 10-20 in regular attendance. Others, completely misunderstanding (and appropriating for their own purposes) what Jesus meant by speaking of his "*little* flock" (Luke 12:32) puff themselves up with pride because their church is small!

Christ-followers may or may not attend a brick-and-mortar building, at any frequency of attendance, as often as they choose. Christ-followers are not under any compulsion of being forced to attend a building – Christ-followers are free in Christ and should not allow religious authorities to intimidate, browbeat, shame and guilt them into becoming a "member" of a physically incorporated entity that calls itself a church.

The only membership that really counts or is eternally significant is our membership, given by God's grace, in the universal body of Christ. In addition to that membership, we are free to be members of a public library, a book club, a small group Bible study or a legally incorporated church – or not.

Imperfect Brick-and-Mortar Churches are Not Proof That Christianity Has Failed

A good friend of mine once told me he was born and raised and educated as a Catholic, and he still is. He told me he had attended Catholic schools from the first grade until high school graduation, and then, with reference to the highly publicized pedophile scandals, he assured me he had not been sexually molested. Then he paused, and looking me in the eye, said, "What a shame that I need to tell you I did not suffer at the hands of religious authorities as so many in my past religious affiliation have… why must I even assure you I was spared such abuse?"

I tried to comfort him, saying that unfortunately heinous and horrific religious abuse of all kinds has no denominational or religious boundaries.

G. K. Chesterton, one of my favorite writers, himself a Catholic, once said, "The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried."

It's often been said, and rightly so, that the body of Christ is not in this world as a staid and stately museum where visitors might be reminded of the perfection of saints, but it is a real and present reality, like a hospital, where imperfect people are served by imperfect people whose only qualification to serve is their allegiance to Jesus Christ, the Great Physician.

It is far easier and far more convenient to "go to church" and assume, having done one's duties and received one's "God fix" that God is now pleased and all is well… than it is to "be the church" by doing the truly hard and difficult thing, yielding to Jesus so that he can do in and through us what needs doing in our immediate world. "The church" is not a holy huddle where club members congregate regularly to be assured that God is happy with them. "The church" is what happens in life, all the time, with all kinds of people, as Jesus lives his life within those who follow him.

Many years ago, sometimes several times a week, my work as a young minister took me past "Speaker's Corner" in London's Hyde Park. Located on the northeast edge of Hyde Park, near Marble Arch and Oxford Street, Speaker's Corner extends a robust and diverse "all-comers-welcome" invitation to speakers who dare to face hostilities from omnipresent hecklers and agitators.

On one occasion a Christian evangelist was preaching, only to be interrupted by a man who appeared to be homeless, desperately in need of personal grooming. In opposition, the un-scrubbed man yelled, "Christianity has been in the world for two thousand years and look at the state of the world."

The evangelist quickly replied… "and water has been in the world for two billion years and look at the state of your face."

Stay tuned for part two next month – as we continue considering the universal body of Christ – his church – of which he is the head, and through whom we may be a part.

With you, following Christ, being the church, by the grace and mercies of God,

Greg Albrecht
President, *Plain Truth Ministries*

P.S. We share this thank-you note from a friend in Texas, and **THANK YOU** for your prayers and financial support which makes this ministry possible!

Thank you, thank you, thank you for all the beautiful, true and uplifting words you share. They bring comfort to my soul and tears to my eyes. We tell ourselves lies about God's everlasting love and free grace when life wears us down and we don't feel able to cope. Your words have wrapped God's arms around me with much-needed healing. I thank God for each and every member of the CWR/PTM team.

CWR/PTM Prayer Requests & Comments – September 2026

These prayer requests are a representative sampling of so many others we receive and pray for. We invite you to join us in praying for these and others that space does not permit us to include here. Thanks for being a CWR/PTM Prayer Partner—*for carrying each other's burdens* (Galatians 6:2).

I'm in terrible pain in my feet and would like prayer for this condition. Thank you.—Idaho

My sister was laid off over a year ago. Please ask God to bless her with a new job.—Georgia

Please pray for my roommate, she has dizziness and nausea. She was in the hospital and they sent her home with medication and head exercises. It doesn't seem to be helping.—British Columbia

Thank you for your continued prayers. I still have lots of pain in my back and hips.—Georgia

Please pray for my general health. I am near 89 and I have issues. But I know God heals.—Illinois

Greg is helping me as I mow my lawn (I listen to one of his messages while mowing). —Washington

Please pray for dear friends who have each had a recent death in the family. One friend is elderly and just lost his wife of many years. The other friend has lost their youngest son. Thank you for praying for these friends who are going through a rough time.—Idaho

Please pray for my mother and my aunt who are both in their 90's. My father and his cousin both recently died, so please keep our family in your prayers.—New York

Please keep me in your daily prayers. I'm elderly and I have several health issues.—West Virginia

I request prayers for my daughter-in-law. She has loss of memory and confusion, which is causing problems in their marriage. Thanks for your prayers.—Minnesota

Please pray for healing for my eyes. Thank you to everyone for your prayers.—South Carolina

Please pray that my sister will be healed from her head injury she sustained in a fall. It caused internal bleeding in her brain.—Texas

Please keep my daughter in your prayers as she just started another round of chemo.—Virginia

Please pray for my brother. He will be having a double hernia surgery soon.—North Dakota

Please pray for my 94-year-old cousin who has fallen, broken some bones and suffered a head wound. Also, please continue to pray for my family.—Kentucky

Pray that the war in Iran will end quickly and to prevent civilians and soldiers from getting killed. Pray that more soldiers are not going to be sent to that war! —Maine

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