

Looking For The True Church?

Most people are quite satisfied keeping the religion of their fathers, but just a few question that religion even if it is Christianity, because they see a discrepancy between it and what they read in the Bible. These are the people God is working with.

These are people God is calling. Revelation 3:20, 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.'

The problem is that there are a million and one churches, all with slightly different beliefs. How do you narrow them down to find the true church, because Jesus Christ has promised that it will always exist? Matthew 16:18, 'And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.'

The answer is found in those very discrepancies, between the false church, and the Bible. We must rely upon the Bible to reveal the disqualifications of some churches and the qualifications of the true church!

First lets notice something the Bible says about its size. Luke 12:32, 'Do not fear, *little flock*, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.' These are the words of Jesus. He reveals that God's church will always be small. Is that surprising? Matthew 7:13-14, 'Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.'

God is not calling everyone now. He is very selective, and only interested in those diligent enough to carefully study His word, and then honour it. Sometimes that can mean we can be almost alone and that takes courage, but He will always be with us, using us to build His church, however small !

Cf Acts 18:26 and 1Corinthians 16:19. 'So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.'

'The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.' House churches are still common today in the true church !

A rival to the true church has always existed, though apostate. Down the centuries it became great and powerful enough to persecute true Christians, and it will again.

Revelation 17: 1-6, 'Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication."

So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman (biblical symbol of a church) sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. And on her forehead a name was written:

mystery, babylon the great, the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth.

I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement.'

This false church and her protestant daughters have sadly misled their followers into rejecting important commandments of God such as the true Sabbath day, Exodus 20:8-10, 'Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the *seventh* day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates.'

It is from out of these churches however, that God still calls many of His people, who recognize false teaching, and determine to act.

The problem behind all these false churches is idolatry. Yes, in some there may be physical idols, to whom people pray, but in all of them there are men who intervene between the people and their God. They may call themselves Pope, priest, vicar, or president but they often claim to speak for and represent God, and in the process either add to God's word with their own rules or change or reject parts of it.

So the people are diverted from the plain words of the Bible and a direct relationship with Jesus Christ, and, in effect make such men their idol. As this first happened in ancient Babylon, the hierarchical systems of church government they established are referred to as Babylon in the Bible and condemned. Cf Revelation 18:2, 'And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!' and verse 4 'And I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.'

Still, many are quite content to call such men "holy father" or "reverend". They don't know that our Heavenly Father is very jealous of His names.

Matthew 23:9, 'Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.'
Psalm 111:9, 'He has sent redemption to His people; He has commanded His covenant forever: Holy and reverend is His name.'

2 Corinthians 11:2, 'For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.'

As we see our Father wants us to remain chaste virgins for Christ.

That's quite understandable when you realize that He is to become our father-in-law when we take part in a future marriage ceremony with Jesus Christ. Revelation 19:7-8, 'Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.'

Only those who, once they have been baptized and been begotten by the Holy Spirit, refrain from returning to such Babylonian systems, so that they remain **chaste virgins**, will take part in the first resurrection as the first-fruit harvest and then marry Christ on the Sea of Glass before God's throne.

Revelation 14 :1-5, 'Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth. These are the ones who were not *defiled with women*, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God.'

These people of God remain chaste simply because they are unpolluted by the additional false teaching provided by that system, which Jesus condemned as the traditions of men.

Mark 7:9,13, 'He said to them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition.'

13 'making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do.' These are simply extra man made rules for people to live by – for example not watching any television, how you must dress, don't use medical helps, use man made rules to determine the Sabbath and Holy Days, pay several tithes, etc, etc. Matthew 23:4 'For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay *them* on men's shoulders; but they *themselves* will not move them with one of their fingers.'

The true church simply teaches the Biblical commandments and encourages people to study diligently and draw their own conclusions about the way He wants us to live. That way each of us is personally responsible to God, rather than men, and it enables us to develop our spiritual muscles – to grow spiritually in faith and build a strong relationship with our Heavenly Father through Jesus Christ.

Isn't that plain? But I have seen many make that mistake, and return to organizations they recognize have false teachings, as though Christ's words mean nothing. That's why only the True church is good enough for the faithful Christian – nothing else will do.

So, now you realize just how important this is – how can we determine the one true church, remembering that it is not an organization – it will not be found as part of a hierarchical system of control with a man or men at the top! What does the Bible say?

Jude 3, 'Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the *faith which was once for all delivered* to the saints.' Jude was Christ's brother. He well understood the pattern set by the apostles in the early church. Next, notice that the churches mentioned throughout the New Testament have a name – the "church of God".

John 17:11,12,26, 'Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep *through Your name* those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are.'

12 'While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.'

26 'And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them'.

1 Corinthians 1:2, 'To the **church of God** which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.' □

That name has been preserved down the centuries because it is the name of God's spirit begotten family, Ephesians 3:14-15, 'For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.'

Next, the true church will have one head, to which all members look-----

Ephesians 1:22, 'And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church.'

Colossians 1:18, 'And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.' The true servants of God point their flocks to Jesus Christ and His Father – you will not see their own names figure prominently on their web sites or in church literature – just Jesus Christ's, nor will that literature ever be sold or be restricted by copyright, for 'freely you have received, freely give.' (Matthew 10:8.) The fact is that if a church is part of the true church, what it presents is not a man's ideas, but simply the Bible, and so it should be free to be copied and reproduced, and the more times the better!

Look at the churches mentioned in the New Testament. All of them are independent churches, only linked together by their name, Biblical beliefs and God's Holy Spirit. John 15:5, 'I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.' From time to time they may have been visited by an apostle or evangelist, but, they were usually led by local elders, who in those days were called bishops, which simply means 'overseer'.

Titus 1:4,5,9. 'To Titus, a true son in *our* common faith: □□ Grace, mercy, *and* peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior.'

5 'For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you.'

9 'holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.'

The apostle God used to write much of the New Testament, and establish most of the gentile churches, was the apostle Paul. He used the churches of God in Judea as an example, a pattern for those gentile churches, 1 Thessalonians 2:14. 'For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans.'

Basically he used the pattern already found in the Judean synagogues, which were democratic lay communities not beholden to any of the religious parties, (Pharisees, Sadducees etc). There was no central headquarters synagogue, no "chief rabbinate", or pope. No office was empowered to enforce standards in all synagogues; each belonged to the community. Each had an elected leader from the elders, and he had an assistant who took care of the rolls.

The rolls were copies of the Old Testament books and these same rolls formed the foundational teaching of the New Testament church.

Hebrews 5:12-6:2 'For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the *oracles of God*; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.' For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who **by reason of use** have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.'

(Read our article "Oracles of God? in 'General Literature'").

2 Timothy 3:16-17, 'All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.' Of course, the only oracles the church possessed in those days was the Old Testament, until the New Testament began to be put together.

This basic pattern still predominates in the true church today, thereby avoiding idolatry, hierarchies, rulership and oppression, using the guidelines set out by Paul in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 to regulate the leadership. 'This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil'.

This is the same simple, independent structure we read of throughout the New Testament; it is recognized that the Churches of God together make up a spiritual house, a temple and a holy priesthood where *all are equal* under Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 2:5, 'you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.'

Willing servant leaders, qualified to teach, provide the example to the flock, following in the footsteps of Christ.

1 Peter 5:2, 'Shepherd the flock of God which is *among you*, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly.'

1 Peter 2:21, 'For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps.'

The true church will always be found keeping the Holy Days observed by Jesus Christ and the early church. Leviticus 23 lists those days. Passover and Unleavened Bread are mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:6-8, Pentecost in Acts 2, Acts 20:16, 1 Corinthians 16:8. The Day of Atonement, commonly called "the Fast" at that time, in Acts 27:9. John 7 describes Christ attending the Feast of Tabernacles which Zechariah 14 makes clear will be observed by the whole world in the Kingdom of God. These Holy Days,

kept by the gentile Christians, picture the Plan of God for all mankind – Read about their meaning in “The Plan of God -revealed by His Holy Days”, to be found in the ‘General Literature’ section.

The true church determines the dates for those days using the same criteria practiced by all the Jews at the time of Christ, for He kept the same days. This is not the current Hebrew calendar used by the Jews today (Please view our DVD ‘The Month of The Abib’) which was only finalized many hundreds of years after Christ.

The true Church of God will be found actively fulfilling the commission Christ gave in Matthew 28:19-20, ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’

This is the same message brought by Jesus Christ. Mark 1:14-15, ‘Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel,’ and it is the first responsibility of God’s church. By baptism and the laying on of hands, God’s Holy Spirit is passed down the centuries.

The second great responsibility the true church fulfills we read of in 1 Peter 5:2, ‘Feed the flock of God which is among you,’

It will always be found providing that vital spiritual food gained by the teaching and expounding of the Holy Bible. This precious teaching, together with the gift of God’s Holy Spirit gained at baptism, edifies the church, building as it were the spiritual temple, girding it with the fruits of the Spirit.

Galatians 5:22-23, ‘But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.’

Well, that’s quite a check-list !

Use it to find the true church, and remember, there was a time when there were hardly any branches of the true church. A church is simply a gathering of those God has called. It is not a building - so, like those early Christians, if you can’t find the true church in your area, start one yourself – just meet in your home with another you have witnessed to. That’s how this church originated and it has helped many others to be blessed also.

Matthew 18:20 ‘For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.’

May God give you the courage to act as those early Christians and follow their Biblical example!