

God's True Church (Part 1)

This morning I'd like to talk about man's quest for truth; where can it be found today?

It's been said that each of us is born with a "God-shaped vacuum" inside of us. That we're all born with an inexpressible craving for something we don't have. Have you ever felt that way? I certainly have.

Subconsciously, we all seem to be seeking for something we can't describe—but something we know we want and really need! So in our restless boredom we seek to fill the void with various things – like fame, fortune, drugs, alcohol, material possessions and leisure-time activities; only to discover when the prize is won, that there's no lasting satisfaction.

And, sooner or later the haunting question of an ancient prophet, echoing from the past, causes us to seek answers that might fill the empty feeling we all experience at some point in our lives.

Let's pray before we open God's word. [Prayer]

Notice what it says in **Isaiah 55:2** "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness (abundance)."

After many people finally achieve what they thought would bring great happiness and satisfaction, they come to realize that they've only been chasing elusive dreams and sense the need for something outside of themselves. But really, this quest for true fulfillment is nothing new! Ever since Adam and Eve chose to go their own way in the Garden of Eden, mankind has had this strange emptiness that only God can fill.

In Old Testament times, God allowed the children of Israel in their wilderness wanderings to become hungry so that would recognize their need of Him. That's basically what God tells us in Deuteronomy 8:3; let's take a look. **Deuteronomy 8:3** "And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live."

Friends, today God's word is our manna! Do you spend at least as much time with your Bible as do at the breakfast, lunch and dinner table? If not, I would encourage you to give it a try; it will change your life. There are no shortcuts to a close relationship with God; we must put forth a little effort, and spending time with God is where the effort needs to be.

And so, God allows modern mankind to sense an inner hunger and restlessness in hopes that they'll reach out and let Him satisfy their longings. And because of this inner longing, we actually do see great religious interest today, don't we? But, are people finding the truth?

Over the past 50 years especially, there's been a tremendous emphasis on ecumenism and a push to break down denominational walls. New churches seem to be springing up all over the place! And each of them claims to be teaching the one true faith, and most of them claim to be God's special people with a special message for everyone on earth. And yet, you don't have to look very far before you realize that those claims can't all be true. And even though they each claim the Bible as the foundation for their beliefs, their teachings are very different.

And so who can the average person on the street ever sort out all the claim and counterclaims of these religious organizations and know for certain which one is the real thing.

And does God really have a special group within Christendom that He recognizes as His church today?

Evidently He does: notice what the apostle Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:4-6** “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”

And also in **1 Timothy 3:15** God tells us that His Church is the “pillar and ground of the truth.” And so, if the church you attend doesn’t have the truth, can it be God’s church?

It’s quite a dilemma when you think about it, isn’t it? And yet the Bible is clear that there is only one faith and one truth.

So where do we start when we’re looking for God’s true church? There are so many denominations, so much controversy, and so much confusion in the religious world today. And one can’t help but wondering why God didn’t make it a little easier to sort it all out, and to quickly be able to find His last-day church.

Well, according to Scripture, Jesus never intended that there be any confusion, and certainly not all the various denomination that have cropped up since the church was first organized.

Just before His crucifixion Jesus prayed, and part of that prayer is recorded in John chapter 17. Turn with me there, **John 17:20-22**. Jesus prayed, “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one.”

According to John, one identifying mark of God’s true church is that the world would be able to recognize Christ’s followers by their unity and love for one another. Something we don’t see much of today! And so this verse makes it clear that Christ didn’t want any division in His church.

1 Corinthians 12:25 says, “There should be no schism in the body.” But at the same time Paul predicted that apostasy would come, and with it division!

Notice what he says in **Acts 20:28-30**. “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.”

Also in **2 Thessalonians 2:1-3**, Paul explains this further. “Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;”

As we turn the pages of church history, we discover that this is exactly what happened. False teachers arose and some accepted their false teachings and left the church while others became confused.

Disciples were drawn away after these false teachers and there was a gradual branching off from the original body.

But, you know what? Through it all God has always had a church, a body of believers that have remained faithful to the teachings of Christ all through the centuries.

But as we think about this, wouldn't it take a lifetime to study all the teachings of every religion to find out which is the true church? Absolutely it would! But there really is a much simpler way.

Government experts tell us that it's quite easy to distinguish a genuine bill from a counterfeit, because they study the characteristics of the genuine in depth. They know the fibrous texture of the paper, the color-fastness of the ink and all the symbols and all the proper order of serial numbers of the genuine. And as they look at a bill, they can mentally compare it with the distinguishing features of the genuine. And if it lacks even one of the characteristics of the genuine, it is a counterfeit; it's just that simple.

And it's the same way with the truth. We don't have to study the teachings of all the various churches for exhaustive hours **if** we know the characteristics of God's true church as given in the Bible. Does that make sense?

God doesn't leave us to guess which one it is, because He's given us the facts we need in His Word. In **Amos 3:7** God tell us that He will do nothing without first revealing His secrets unto His servants the prophets.

And so we can know for certain that the answers we seek regarding this subject today are found exclusively in the Bible. And so, don't go to your preacher for answers to these vital questions; go to God's Word! That's where your safety is! Men in sacred office can, and often do lead the members of their congregations in the wrong direction, but God's Word is always 100% correct, and that's where we need to go if we want to know about God's true church.

The Book of Revelation prophesied also of the apostasy and religious confusion that would exist in the last days by predicting the conflict between Christ's church and Satan.

Revelation chapter 12 gives a panoramic view of church history from Christ's time to the end of the world. Notice what it says in **Revelation 12:1, 2**. "And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered."

Here God pictures a woman clothed with the sun, which represents light or truth. And so, she is a virtuous woman. But what does it all mean? Well, in Bible prophecy a woman represents God's people, or His church. Let's prove that from the Bible. Go with me to **Jeremiah 6:2**. "I have likened the daughter of Zion to a comely (beautiful) and delicate woman." But who is Zion? Let's go to Isaiah chapter 51 and verse 16 for the answer. **Isaiah 51:16** tells us who Zion is: "And I have put my words in thy mouth, and I have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand, that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, **Thou art my people.**" And so, Jeremiah tells us that Zion can be compared to a beautiful woman; that's what's depicted in Revelation 12. And Isaiah says that this woman represents God's people or His church.

And so, as we link these two texts together, we see clearly that God uses the symbol of a virtuous woman to represent His true church. And the apostle Paul uses the same terminology to describe the Corinthian

church. Notice what it says in **2 Corinthians 11:2**. Paul says, “For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.”

And, so there is no doubt that a woman represents God’s church. However, John was also shown another woman, which he describes in **Revelation 17:3-5**. Let’s read that also. “So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.”

This symbolic language describes an impure adulterous woman, or a false church, or that part of Christianity that has been unfaithful to Christ by compromising its relationship to the world because she’s a harlot, or an adulteress.

Notice how **James 4:4** brings out this truth also. “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.”

A fallen woman, then, represents a false church, and a pure woman represents a pure church—or God’s church; that’s pretty clear.

Let’s look again now at the prophecy of the pure woman back in **Revelation 12**; we already read the first two verses, so let’s continue on with **verses 3-9**. “And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne. And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days. And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.”

Only one child in the history of the world was to “rule all nations with a rod of iron” and be “caught up unto God, and to his throne,” and that was Jesus.

We’ll come back and explain some of what we just read in chapter 12 in a minute, but I want you to look at another chapter in Revelation that gives us a bit more information about this child. Speaking of the second coming of Christ, **Revelation 19:13-16** gives us conclusive proof of who this is. “And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. [And if you want to know Who the Word of God is, go to the gospel of John 1:1 & 14] And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.”

This striking of the nations does not mean that Jesus will set up an earthly government during a millennium of peace like many people believe today—but that the Good Shepherd will come to deliver

His flock and then exterminate all the rebellious nations of earth. When the Bible speaks of a “rod of iron” it’s referring to the shepherd’s rod. The shepherd’s rod had a crook on one end and an iron point on the other. With the crook the shepherd could gently lead the sheep here he wanted them to go and with the iron tip he could fend off the wolves. And so when Jesus comes back, it’s to rescue His people and to do away with the wicked.

Also Paul, in Ephesians 1:20 tells how Jesus was “caught up unto God’s throne” when He was raised from the death, where He now sits at the right hand of God.

And so, let’s put all this into perspective. The war that began in heaven moved to this planet when Satan and the angels that chose to follow him were cast out. And working through pagan Rome at the time, Satan tried to take Jesus’ life as soon as He was born. That’s what we just read in Revelation chapter 12. Satan always works through earthly powers, and pagan Rome held world dominance when Jesus was born. And so this dragon, primarily, represents Satan and secondarily, Pagan Rome that Satan was working through.

You’ll remember that Herod, the Roman Governor, decreed that all male children two years and under should be killed. But an angel warned Mary and Joseph to escape with Jesus into Egypt. Then afterward, when Herod had died, they were told to return to Nazareth where Jesus grew up and learned the carpenters trade.

But that wasn’t the end of it, because ever afterward the devil dogged the footsteps of Jesus throughout His life and ministry hoping to block God’s plan to save our fallen world. And as Christ’s body hung upon the cross, Satan thought he had won the battle. But in reality, an empty tomb was the devil’s defeat. Christ arose and ascended to His Father’s throne just as the prophecy predicted!

And failing in his attempt to destroy Jesus, Satan then turned his wrath on Christ’s woman, or the Christian church, and all but one of Christ’s disciples died a martyr’s death. And the devil didn’t stop there, but persecuted the church all through the ages, and of course, he’s still at it today.

As long as the apostles were alive, the church stood firmly for the truth, but with second and third generation Christians, came compromise and apostasy.

In the book titled *Ecclesiastical Research*, pg. 51, it says this about early church history. “Toward the latter end of the second century, most of the churches assumed a new form; the first simplicity disappeared as the old disciples retired to their graves.”

Then in the fourth century, Emperor Constantine tried to hold the Roman Empire together by uniting pagans and Christians into one great system of religion that became known as the universal church, or the papacy—the word “catholic” is derived from the Greek word, “katholikos,” spelled with a K, meaning “general, or universal.”

And as this developed; Christianity lost much of its old stigma, and became very popular all of a sudden. And as a result, heathens were baptized into the church bringing many of their pagan beliefs and practices with them.

In another historical book titled *Centuries of Christianity*, pg 58, it says, “Hordes of baptized pagans meant that paganism had diluted the moral energies of organized Christianity to the point of impotence.”

However, during these long years of apostasy, many Christians remained faithful to God's truths and protested the changes that had crept into the church, and refusing to compromise their position, many were persecuted for their stand.

And not long afterward the Roman emperors issued edicts making it a crime punishable by death to reject the false practices of the state church.

In the book titled *History of the Popes*, Vol. 2, pg. 334, it says that they were "stripped and naked . . . and many of them were inhumanly massacred."

And foreseeing it all years beforehand, the apostle John wrote about it as we read in **Revelation 12**.

And what happened to the woman we read about a few minutes ago? **Revelation 12:6** says God prepared a place for her to flee into the wilderness, and that she would be sustained there "a thousand two hundred and three score days," or 1,260 days.

The fact that she had a "flee," means that she was being persecuted, and so God provided a place of refuge for her.

Now, in a previous study, we already discovered that each day in Bible prophecy stands for a year of literal time. There is a prophetic statement found in the book of **Number 14:34** where God says, "I have appointed thee each day for a year." There's also another one in **Ezekiel 4:6** where God says, "I have appointed thee each day for a year."

So the oppression of God's faithful people, as predicted in Revelation, was to continue, not for 1,260 days, but for 1,260 literal years. And history accurately confirms this Bible prophecy. The Roman Emperor Justinian, ordered the Roman general, Belisarius, to wipe out three Arian powers that opposed the church of Rome, and as the last of these powers was eliminated in 538 A.D., here's what Justinian declared the bishop of Rome to be: "The head of the church, the true and effectual corrector of heretics." That was taken from the "Code of Justinian," pg. 293. And thus the reign of intolerance for so-called "heretics" began in 538 A.D. without any nation left to oppose the universal state church, or the papacy.

And as a result, faithful Christians who continued to cherish the truths revealed in God's Word found that the only way to preserve their faith was to flee, just as Revelation predicted they would. The apostle John says "the woman fled into the wilderness."

The Waldenses and the Albigenses in the Piedmont Mountains, the Huguenots all over France and Bohemia, and other faithful Christians fled to the Alps in northern Italy and southern France, settling in secluded valleys, remote caves, and high mountains in order to be able to worship God according to the dictates of their conscience. But they were hunted down as common criminals and many were killed. And their crime? They refused to give up the plain teachings of the Bible.

Millions of Christians died rather than compromise their faith. Some historians estimate the death toll to be as high as 50 million.

And the sad thing is, other professed Christians who believed they were doing God's will were the ones that martyred those who died!

But after many years God's truth finally began to triumph through the Protestant reformation. The Bible, long chained to monastery walls and cathedral pulpits was translated into the language of the common people and scattered throughout the world. No long was God's truth to be hidden.

Courageous Reformers boldly proclaimed God's Word, and some like Huss and Jerome were burned at the stake. And others, like Luther, Wycliffe, and Tyndale, were hunted and persecuted.

But finally, with the discovery of America, new freedom and a new refuge were provided for the persecuted Christians of Europe. On the shores of a newborn nations was laid the foundation of civil and religious liberty. And it's this God given freedom that is today being chipped away once again.

But here's the point; the era of compromise and persecution predicted in Revelation 12, finally came to an end in 1798, when the atheistic government of Napoleon sent General Berthier to take the pops captive—exactly 1,260 years after the period of persecution began in 538 A.D. At the end of the eighteenth century, when this prophetic time period came to a close, in spite of the many long years of persecution, God still had a very small group of faithful believers who clung to the teachings of the Bible instead of the pagan traditions of Catholicism.

But that's not the end of the story by any means. Prophecy foretells that afterward Satan would turn his fury upon the true church of God that remained after this prophetic period ended in 1798. Let's read about that in **Revelation 12:17**. "And the dragon (Satan) was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ."

A remnant, for anyone acquainted with fabrics, is the last piece of cloth on the bolt. Just so, the "remnant" of God's church at the end would be the same as the church that existed from apostolic times. They're cut from the same cloth. The church that was left after the time prophecy came to an end would look the same, just as the cloth on the beginning of the bolt looks the same at the end. That is, the teaching and characteristics of the remnant will be the same as that of the church that Jesus first organized at the beginning.

So, translating Revelation 12:17 literally, we would say, "The devil was angry. . . and went to make war with God's last-day church."

Now, if you didn't catch it, John has just described two characteristics by which we can recognize this remnant, last-day church.

#1: They keep the commandments of God!

But doesn't every church teach that Christians should obey God's commandments? Well, not exactly! Not totally! Most churches today teach their members, in one way or another, to disobey some of God's commandments. For example, some congregations are taught to bow before images (a violation of the 2nd commandment). And most of the religious world has lost sight of the memorial of God's creation described in the fourth commandment which says, "Remember the seventh-day Sabbath to keep it holy."

And not only was God's remnant, or last-day church to keep all the commandments of God, just like the apostolic church did, but the prophecy also says that it will "have the testimony of Jesus." So we better find out what the testimony of Jesus is. Let's turn to **Revelation 19:10** for the answer. "And I fell at his feet to worship him (the angel). And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of

thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”

So, just like the early Christian church, God’s remnant will have all the gifts of the spirit, including the spirit of prophecy, but we’ll have to wait until next time to talk more about this special gift.

#2 Then God gives yet another characteristic to help us identify His last day church: The command to preach the everlasting gospel in all the world is symbolized in Revelation chapter 14 by three angels flying in the midst of heaven. The first part of this three-fold message emphasizes two great truths to be shares with every person.

Let’s read about it in **Revelation 14:6, 7**. “And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.”

Here we have a warning to those living in Earth’s last hours to remember that the Day of Judgment is come or **has** come. In other words, it’s in progress today, and it has been for quite some time.

This judgment has to do with another prophecy connected with the cleansing of the sanctuary mentioned in **Daniel 8:14**, but this a subject that is way too big to deal with today; so we’ll have to wait on that too.

This first angel’s message is also a reminder of the great memorial of God’s creative power, the seventh-day Sabbath. Did you notice how similar this language is to the fourth commandment given in **Exodus 20**? If you’ll read that and compare it with Revelation 14, you’ll see that both commands are nearly the same.

Then there’s the second angel’s message of **Revelation 14:8** where John says, “And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.”

Babylon, you’ll recall, had to do with the harlot woman riding on the scarlet colored beast we read about in **Revelation 17**. And so, this second angel’s message calls God’s people to separate from those churches that are not keeping all the commandments of God and that deny the last day prophetic gift, or “the testimony of Jesus.” And so this message calls our attention to the apostasy in religion today.

And finally, there’s the third angel’s message in Revelation 14:9-12 that warns against receiving the mark of the beast. “And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever (irretrievable): and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name. Here is the patience (cheerful endurance) of the saints (holy ones): here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.”

We’ve already looked at this in parts 1 & 2 in the Landmarks and Landmines series titled “The Law of God.” If you didn’t receive these two CDs, you can contact me and I’ll be glad to send them to you.

But these three angel's messages are extremely important for us to understand, because the rejection of any aspect of this three-fold warning will bring the seven last plagues upon us if we fail to heed these warnings.

When Jesus was here, He indicated that there would come a time when all His faithful followers from all churches would heed the instructions we just read in **Revelation 14:6-12**. Notice what the Lord Himself said in **John 10:14-16**. "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep (on the cross). And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd."

And friends, that time is not too far distant; in fact, this fold is being made up as I speak. Jesus said His sheep will have to be called out of those other folds that have not carefully followed the teachings of His Word, and this call is going forth today! Perhaps this call that's coming to you right now is what you need to follow in order to be a part of the remnant. If so, I encourage you not to delay, because, dear friend, the time is at hand.

The apostle John elaborates further upon this point in **Revelation 18:1-5** where he says God's faithful followers will be called out of the religious error and confusion that exists at the end of time, that is, the time in which we are living today. Notice how he describes this – turn with me to Revelation chapter 18.

(By the way, as we read this, you'll notice how similar the language is to the second angel's message we just read in Revelation 14:8, because it's actually a repeating of the second angel's message at the end of time as it joins the third angel's message, and therefore we refer to it as the fourth angel's message.) Notice what it says, **Revelation 18:1-5**. "And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies. And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities."

Now, let's just briefly review some of the distinguishing characteristics of God's last-day church as given in the Bible:

1. There will be love for one another and a unity of teaching
2. God's remnant church was to appear after the period of terrible persecution that ended in 1798
3. They will have the faith of Jesus that leads them to keep all the commandments of God just as Jesus did
4. They will proclaim the three angels' messages of Revelation 14 and also the fourth angel's message of Revelation 18 to all the world in preparation for the coming of Christ
5. The testimony of Jesus, or the spirit of prophecy, or the prophetic gift will be manifest within the midst of this remnant church.

So, as you can see, these five points alone would eliminate just about every church out there, wouldn't they? It really isn't very difficult to determine who God's people are when we allow the Bible itself to be our teacher.

Well, our time is about gone and I wanted to say more about the prophetic gift that would be given to the remnant, but we'll have to wait until next time, but in the meantime remember this: All churches may look like the real thing at first glance, just like the counterfeit bill, and they're all doing good things and they all teach some truth, but as you study God's description of the genuine, it's not that difficult to eliminate the ones that don't measure up to the main points we've covered this morning.

And last but not least, in **Matthew 7:20, 21**, Jesus gave the acid test to know those who truly belong to His church. "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."

So you see, it's not enough to know all the facts we've looked at this morning, we must also recognize and incorporate the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. When Jesus truly abides in our hearts, we're going to have love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance, or self-control, as it says in **Galatians 5:22, 23**.

And so friends, we need to examine our own hearts and compare ourselves to this list of characteristics I just mentioned. And what do you suppose if the most important fruit to have? Love! You can read that in **1 Corinthians 13**.

And in John 13:35 Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." And this love is every bit as important as knowing the other characteristics of God's remnant church.

Now, I've mentioned several things about God's true church this morning, but the one point we need to recognize is that God's church isn't a building or a denominational organization of some kind, but individual people who love God and keep His commandments.

Church organization is important and even necessary for the promotion of the gospel, because we can accomplish more together than we can individually. Besides, we need the fellowship for our own spiritual development; but never forget it, people make up the church.

You will never be saved in God's kingdom simply because you become a member of some denomination. You will never be saved because you've subscribed to some church creed, or by clinging to any particular name! All who are saved will be saved only because they have become members of the body of Christ, and His body, made up of individuals, will live like Jesus lived while He was here on earth.

Didn't Jesus say that "wherever two or three are gathered" in His name that He would be there in their midst? You see friends; it takes the presence of Jesus to compose a church. Where Christ is, even among the humble few, this is Christ's church, for the High and Holy One who inhabits eternity can alone constitute a church.

Have you ever considered what the word **church** means? It comes from the Greek word "ek-klay-see-ah," meaning "a calling out." A calling out of what? **1 Peter 2:9** says that we are called out of darkness into God's marvelous light. That means that we are called out of a life of sin and rebellion to a life of holiness and obedience to God's commandments like we just read in the third angel's message of Revelation 14. And in Revelation 18 God's people are called out of Babylon, which means confusion; called out of the confusing and conflicting creeds of the various religious organizations that are not keeping all of God's 10 commandments.

You see God has a people in all the various religious organizations that are ignorant of this truth, and for a time God winks at their ignorance, because they don't know any better. But once the truth has been brought home to their mind and conscience, they become responsible for what they know. Does that make sense?

In James 4:17 it says, "to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." And if we deliberately continue in sin after we know the truth, we will be eternally lost unless we repent and through the power of the Spirit crucify the lusts of our fallen flesh.

So, if the people you worship with are breaking any one of the 10 commandments, or if they are nominal Christians who teach one thing and do another, God is calling you to come out and be separate from them. And if you refuse to listen to what the Holy Spirit says, you will then be held corporately responsible for what they are doing, and Revelation 18:4 says that you will partake of **her** sins and receive **her** plagues, because **her** sins will be placed upon your head for continuing to fraternize with her.

And so it's pretty serious, isn't it? You know, sometimes you have to be what many would consider the bearer of bad news in order to pave the way for the acceptance of the good news. Even if you have to worship all alone, or with one or two others of like faith, it would be better than worshipping with a large congregation of commandment breakers and lukewarm professors. **Revelation 3:16** tells us what's going to happen to them, and believe me, you don't want to go there.

I encourage you to follow all the truth that God has so graciously revealed to you this morning, for by so doing you will become a part of God's remnant in these last days. And we already know that taking a stand for this truth will make the devil angry, that's what we read in Revelation 12:17. And he will do his very best to discourage you from doing what you know is right, and many times this anger will manifest itself through our own family members. But know that you are one with Christ and one with others who are one with Christ will give you the strength to suffer persecution and still remain loyal to the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we have studied some important truths this morning, and we want to be a part of the remnant of the pure woman's seed. Please give us the strength and courage to make the devil angry with us, and then give us the strength and courage to remain faithful under all the hardship and persecution and discouragement the enemies of truth can and will throw at us as human probation draws ever closer to an end. May our names be registered in the Lamb's Book of Life this morning and never be blotted out. And may You, Dear Father, be glorified in our lives as we commit the keeping of our souls to You, in the worthy name of Jesus we ask and give thanks. Amen!