

“IS THERE A CHURCH NEAR ME?”

Convenience vs. the Truth—Understanding Which Is More Important

ANYTOWN, U.S.A. On a street sits a building with stained glass windows, a towering steeple, a cross, and a wide entrance. A sign in front beckons: “Join Us for Sunday Worship Services – 11:00 AM – Everyone Welcome. Come Just As You Are!”

A woman passing by is pleased she can attend this church “just as she is.”

On page five of the “Lifestyles and Religion” section of the local newspaper is a listing of area churches. A title above reads, “Attend the Church of Your Choice.” The reader runs his index finger down the list. His finger comes to rest on a church conveniently close by. It will do.

Such scenarios play out countless times. On Sunday morning, millions walk through the doors of the church of their choice. Convenience, ease of attending, a laidback atmosphere and a “make me feel good” message are often their only criteria. Although people may not agree with all of the church’s doctrines, they perceive that agreeing with the big or important ones is “good enough.” Cafeteria Christianity is the accepted norm.

But almost no one gives thought as to whether the church he or she has chosen is the Church Jesus Christ built (Matt. 16:18) or if it has His teachings (28:20). Others *assume* they *have* chosen Christ’s Church, yet have not proven it.

Does it matter?

Only One Church

The Restored Church of God, which publishes *The Real Truth* magazine, is often contacted by individuals who ask, “Is there a church in my area?”—“Do you have a church near me?”—“Can you tell me if there is a church affiliated with you or one that has similar beliefs in my town?” A few wonder if they can attend a service to “check us out.”

They may be readers of *The Real Truth* or of our literature. Having been exposed to traditional Christianity’s teachings, the expectation may be that The Restored Church of God is just another of the many denominations or sects of what they have been told (and wrongly assume) is collectively the true Church, and that RCG is basically the same in teachings and manner.

In Matthew 16:18, Jesus said, “I will build My Church.” He was a carpenter and the son of a carpenter. He knew what it meant to conceive, design, plan and build a structure. He followed proper building principles and practices, beginning with a solid foundation. He did not build in a haphazard, shoddy, confusing or disjointed manner, nor have sections scattered everywhere. Whatever He built reflected directly upon Him—structures indicative of His skills as a Master Builder. These reflected quality.

In building His Church, Jesus used the same approach. It is “built upon the foundation [teachings] of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ

Himself being the chief cornerstone” (Eph. 2:20), is a “building fitly framed *together*” (vs. 21)—not scattered and divided among many groups—and is “teaching all nations to observe ALL things [not ‘some’ or ‘most’] *whatsoever* I [not men] have commanded” (Matt. 28:20).

Christ called His Church a “little flock” (Luke 12:32). This is far different from what is pictured and practiced by professing Christian churches, whose membership numbers in the billions.

God has only *one* Church. Its doctrines and practices are uniquely different from those of traditional, mainstream Christianity. It holds solely to the truth of God’s Word—the Bible.

Nearly all churches of the world practice an “open door” policy. This is because they are not overly concerned with what attendees believe. Here again, the Church of God is different. A person must have sufficient background and understanding of its teachings prior to attending. This is necessary to appreciate what a person will hear and learn. (Our four-part *World to Come* broadcast series “The True Church” carefully introduces who and what is the *only* Church that Jesus built.)

Only the Church that Jesus built has the true knowledge and understanding of salvation—what it is and what one must do to receive it. It must be the truth that the true Church teaches that attracts a person—*not* large numbers of members, *not* a congregation nearby, *not* ease of attending, *not* a “feel good

message” and *not* large impressive buildings in which to meet.

Those looking for a *large* church or one *close* to them are not looking for the *true* Church!

Those attracted to the truth must recognize that Christ’s Church is a “little flock,” and follows the pattern of the early Church, which “continues steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). They understand that the Church is not a physical building. It is the *ekklesia*—the “called out” ones—who, believing the same things (vs. 44), continue with one accord (vs. 46), faithfully assembling together on the Sabbath (Heb. 10:25) and, as necessary, in members’ homes (Rom. 16:3, 5; I Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Philemon 1:2).

Yet none can *join* the Church that Christ built (and is still building today). God must CALL each person. Jesus plainly stated, “NO MAN can come to Me, except the Father which has sent Me DRAW him” (John 6:44). (To understand more, read our article “Are You Being Called?”)

The Truth

The truth of God—His doctrines, the knowledge of the kingdom of God and how to enter it—has its own attraction for those who love it. Such people comprehend they have been given the opportunity “to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 13:11).

Jesus likened it to “treasure hid in a field; the which when a man has found, he hides, and for *joy* thereof goes and sells *all that he has*, and buys that field” (vs. 44). It is also “like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold *all that he had*, and bought it” (vs. 45-46).

There is a willingness to “pay the price” in the mind of one who has been given such great and precious knowledge. In effect, he is willing to “run barefoot across broken glass through an open field dodging sniper fire” to hold on to the truth. Assembling in homes with smaller numbers (or perhaps even alone), and having to sometimes drive great distances to do so, is not a deterrent. The “pearl of great price” is well worth it.

You have likely read or heard of John 8:32, which states, “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” But do you understand how and from what the truth frees you? Most assume they do.

Revelation 12:9 calls Satan “the great dragon...which deceives the whole world.” Take that statement for what it says. The entire world is deceived by Satan. As God’s (and humanity’s) arch-enemy, this master deceiver counterfeits every one of God’s doctrines. Through traditional Christianity, Satan presents his teachings as from God, pawning off ancient, pagan religious practices to an unsuspecting humanity.

In place of the true Sabbath, the devil presents Sunday worship. In place of God’s Holy Days, he promotes the pagan holidays of Christmas and Easter, which were practiced long ago to honor pagan deities. In place of the knowledge of being born into the divine God Family and ruling with Jesus Christ in the kingdom of God, Satan has duped “Christianity” into believing that being “born again” is some sort of ethereal feeling, and that the reward of the saved is “rolling around heaven” for eternity. That man has an immortal soul; therefore, eternal life really is not a gift from God—and that now is the only day of salvation, meaning that those who lived before Jesus Christ was born or never heard the name of Jesus are “lost,” doomed to an ever-burning hell.

People succumb to these and other false teachings, and remain ignorant of God’s step-by-step PLAN OF SALVATION, through which the vast majority who have lived since Adam will be saved.

The truth sets one free from Satan’s deception—free from bondage to the devil and his lies (John 8:44). It sets a person free from the way that leads to eternal death, and puts one on the path that leads to eternal life. It releases us from slavery to the ways and customs of this world, into the liberty of Jesus Christ (Luke 4:18; II Cor. 3:17; Gal. 5:1; Jms. 1:25).

Moreover, the truth of God protects the begotten, yet unborn, sons of God from “every wind of [false] doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait

to deceive” (Eph. 4:14). It sanctifies believers (John 17:17) and cleanses (Eph. 5:26), corrects, reproveth and instructs them (II Tim. 3:16).

Hearing and then practicing the truth builds faith (Rom. 10:17; Jms. 2:17-20). It is “able to make you wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus...[and] is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine...for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (II Tim. 3:15-17).

The truth gives wisdom, knowledge and understanding, and is a lamp to our feet, lighting our path toward inheriting God’s kingdom (Psa. 119:98-100, 104-105).

The Straight and Narrow Way

Untold millions have been taught by this world’s ministers that there are “many paths to heaven” or “many spokes on the wheel of salvation.” This is said to try to make sense of the confusion and competing messages of Christendom, and to keep its deceived adherents from questioning its nonsensical teachings.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The Bible—the word of truth—says no such thing.

Notice what Christ says about the path to eternal life: “Enter you in at the strait [narrow] gate: for *wide* is the gate, and *broad* [easy] is the way, that leads to *destruction*, and *many* there be which go in there at. Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leads unto life, and *few* there be that find it” (Matt. 7:13-14).

This world’s version of Christianity offers the broad, easy way, a wide entrance, a come-just-as-you-are, nothing-is-expected-of-you sales pitch, which appeals to carnal nature (Rom. 8:7).

Jesus’ words counter this reasoning: “Not everyone that says unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that *does* the will of My Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21). You must be a “doer of the word, and not [a] hearer only” (Jms. 1:22).

“For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more” (Luke 12:48).

Jesus also says, “For many are called, but FEW are chosen” (Matt. 22:14). Actually, few *choose to be chosen!*

Why is this?

In the Parable of the Sower (Luke 8:4-15), Christ explains that some who hear the truth: (1) allow the wiles of the devil to stop them from responding; (2) give up because of trials or persecution; (3) are more concerned with the cares of this present physical life, and are not willing to give up the riches and pleasures Satan’s world has to offer; (4) respond to it, practice it and keep it, enduring to the end all while developing holy, righteous, godly character.

True Christianity is a *way of life* that brings countless blessings. It is a rich, abundant and joyful life (John 10:10 – last part; 14:27; 15:11; Rom. 15:11). It involves *more* than just believing the truth. It means actively practicing—LIVING—it.

Yet it also means fighting against the course of this “present evil world” (Gal. 1:4). It means coming out of its ways, practices, customs and religions, and being willing to stand out from the crowd of those who keep Sunday, Christmas, New Year’s, Easter and other worldly celebrations. It means that trials, tribulations and persecution for “being different” will come. Yes, “we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

It may even mean difficulties with friends, family and employers, and suffering loss. Yet, in return, receiving a spiritual family of like-minded believers now and eternal life later (Matt. 10:34-39; 19:28-29; Mark 10:29-30).

But understand that, through it all, the testing of our faith builds patience (Jms. 1:3) and godly character, in hope of receiving eternal life (Rom. 5:1-5). “That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (I Pet. 1:7)—that “an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly

into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (II Pet. 1:11).

For those who commit their lives to living the truth, “there has no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not [allow] you to be tempted above that you are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it” (I Cor. 10:13). And though “many are the afflictions of the righteous...the LORD delivers him out of them all” (Psa. 34:19).

These promises are sure!

God’s Work!

Jesus Christ was a Messenger sent from God with a commission: “I must work the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day: the night comes, when no man can work” (John 9:4); “I must preach the kingdom of God...for therefore am I sent” (Luke 4:43). He “went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom” (Matt. 4:23), “saying, the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent you, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15).

Christ preached the gospel of the coming world-ruling government of God. His Church does the same.

At the end of His ministry on Earth, Jesus told His apostles, “All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go you therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Teaching them to observe *all things* whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:18-20).

He instructed Peter three times, “If you love Me, feed My sheep” (John 21:15-17). Christ’s Church fulfills this commission also. As the Christian’s spiritual Mother (Gal. 4:26), the Church protects, nourishes and feeds God’s spirit-begotten children.

Whether one is close to a congregation, or is an isolated member, it makes no difference. With over 100 books and

booklets, scores of reprint articles, a 30-lesson *Bible Introduction Course*, 209 “Question and Answer” letters, numerous other pieces of literature and hundreds of sermons, with more being constantly added, RCG teaches all of God’s truth—all that one needs to know about salvation.

Some congregations in The Restored Church of God begin with one faithful person, couple or family. In time, God often quickly adds to a specific area (Acts 2:47), growing the congregation. Also, those who start as “pioneers” in their area have opportunities at various times of the year to meet with more brethren (for example, at the annual Feast of Tabernacles).

Whether they attend a congregation or worship alone, God’s people are abundantly fed with spiritual food. They receive weekly sermon CDs and *Announcement Bulletins* to hold Sabbath services at home, which educate and inform them about God’s Work. RCG has the largest amount of literature explaining the truths of God that the world has ever seen. This literature, covering every biblical subject, is provided to all members.

Again, Jesus has only *one* Church. It does His Work under a government that explains and declares the truth through two commissions: (1) preaching the *true* gospel of the soon-coming kingdom of God as a witness to the world, and (2) feeding the flock of God.

By simply reading this article, you have come in contact with that Church. It has trained and consecrated ministers of the true Jesus Christ. Though a little flock, His congregations around the world are set apart and fed by the truth.

Those seeking the true Church: The truth taught there is much more important than attracting large numbers or being conveniently close.

Truth or convenience? Truth should always be the deciding factor.

We recommend reading our book *The History of the True Church – Where Is It Today?* □

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HOW TO CONTACT US

The Restored Church of God
P.O. Box 23295
Wadsworth, OH 44282
USA

The Restored Church of God
P.O. Box 4064
St. Catharines, ON L2R 7S3
CANADA

Phone: (330) 334-2266
Fax: (330) 334-6513

www.thercg.org
e-mail: info@thercg.org