

The True Church

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God does have a true church; and you can be part of it.

Part 1

There are so many religions in the world, you might wonder which is the true religion. If you ask a sociologist which is the true religion, he will say it is a silly question. Sociologists believe religions were invented by men to keep order and give life some meaning. So, in their view, all religions are just fables, so it is foolish to even talk about a true religion. Instead, they study religions to determine which is the “best” religion—that is, which religion does the best job of maintaining an orderly society and providing a feeling of self worth.

Atheistic intellectuals view all religions as cleverly designed fables with no real basis in fact. Either the sociologists are right, or they are right in every case except one.

We believe the latter. There is one true religion, and a whole bunch of counterfeits. We Christians believe God really exists, and He has revealed Himself to man. The Bible is the inspired word of God, which tells us about Him, and warns us about the false religions Satan uses to draw people away from God.

So let’s set the theme for today’s broadcast with this song.

[music – “There is a God”]

Part 2

There are so many religious fables devised by man, it is easy to see why some people would believe that all religions are nothing more than fables devised by men. There is no question that Buddhism was invented by Buddha, Confucianism was invented by Confucius, and Greek mythology was invented by Homer and other Greek poets. Certainly there are many man-made religions. How can we distinguish the one true religion from all these cleverly designed fables?

Logically, we can ask, if the Olympian gods really exist and want to be worshipped, why did they wait so many years for Homer to tell people about them, and why would subsequent poets, like Virgil, change the stories about them? Clearly, Greek mythology cannot be the true religion. The truth doesn’t change, and truth is eternal. Any religion that has a definite beginning, and changes over time, can’t be the true religion.

Of course, one could argue that all of the Protestant denominations have historical origins, and some have changed their doctrines slightly over the years, so therefore none of them could be the True Church. That’s true—to a certain extent. The True Church cannot be uniquely identified with a specific denomination. The many different denominations are all human institutions that attempt to encapsulate the one true religion, and have been successful to greater or lesser extents at various times in history. That is, at any given time, the beliefs and practices of some denominations are closer to the true religion than other denominations. Beyond that, some of the congregations in a particular denomination are closer

to the true religion than other congregations in that same denomination. And, going even farther, the beliefs and practices of some members of a particular congregation are closer to the true religion than other members of that same congregation.

God's True Church cannot be uniquely associated with a particular denomination or congregation. God's True Church is made up of people who believe and obey the word of God as spelled out in the Bible. Denominations and congregations have been established to promote those beliefs and behaviors, with greater or lesser success at various times in history. Sacred history has shown us that institutional churches have drifted away from God's ideal many times, so reformation is a recurring need.

Adam and Eve were the first two members of God's True Church. They loved and obeyed God, until Satan tricked them into disobedience. After they sinned, they were still members of God's True Church. As far as we can tell, they repented of their sins, and depended upon the promised sacrifice of Jesus for their salvation, so we can reasonably expect them to be resurrected at the second coming of Jesus and enjoy eternal life in the Earth made new, even though they did not hold membership in any of the Christian denominations existing today.

God established religious practices in the Garden of Eden. He sacrificed an animal in order to provide Adam and Eve with clothing to cover their nakedness; but there was more to the sacrifice than just a way to provide clothing. He explained to them the significance of the sacrifice. The animal that He sacrificed was a visible promise of the sacrifice of His Son for their sins. God's first church was established right there in the Garden of Eden. It was the patriarchal system, where the father led his family in the worship of God through observance of the Sabbath, and animal sacrifices.

Adam's son, Abel, obeyed God and practiced animal sacrifice in the proper way, and was looked upon with favor by God. But God did not accept Cain's sacrifice of things he had grown himself, despite Cain's good intentions. Satan had convinced Cain that God would appreciate a gift produced by Cain's own hands more than the animal sacrifice God had specified. Cain made his sacrifice with the best intentions. But obedience matters to God more than motive, so God rejected Cain's sacrifice.

The patriarchal system was instituted by God, giving fathers the responsibility for maintaining the true worship of God in their families; but fathers were gradually fooled by Satan's deceptions. By Noah's day, fathers had become so corrupt that the entire world was filled with selfishness, greed and violence. God was sorry He had made the world. By the time the flood came, the only remaining members of God's true, invisible church were in Noah's family. They were the only ones who were saved.

Despite its failure, the patriarchal system remained the human institution responsible for maintaining the true worship of God even after the flood. God chose Abraham to be the father of many nations. As faithful as Abraham was, he was not perfect. He lied about his relationship with his wife to two different kings because he didn't trust God to protect him. He took Hagar to be his second wife because he didn't trust God to fulfill his promise through Sarah. But God worked with him, and his son Isaac, and his grandson Israel, and the descendants of Israel. Over the generations, however, the patriarchs gradually drifted away from the true faith again, to the point where God had to punish them and get their attention by making them slaves in Egypt.

In Egypt, God reminded the Israelites about the plan of salvation through a new ceremony called "Passover." The blood on the doorpost that saved the firstborn sons was proof that the blood of Jesus would ransom all of God's children. Their deliverance from slavery to the Egyptians was symbolic of our deliverance from slavery to sin. There is nothing doctrinally new in the Passover service—it is simply a

more visual representation of God's eternal plan of salvation. It wasn't the blood of the lamb they sacrificed that saved the first born—it was the blood of the Lamb of God that saved them, and saves us.

In light of the failure of the patriarch to keep the worship of God pure and true, God created a more elaborate institution involving priests and a temple. In the Jewish religion He created symbols, ceremonies, and festivals designed to teach the people about the plan of salvation. The plan of salvation didn't change. God merely created more visible ways to teach the plan to mankind.

Because mankind had largely forgotten God's law, He wrote down His commandments in stone as a permanent reminder for all to see.

God did not create a new religion or new laws on Mt. Sinai. The plan of salvation didn't change. Salvation still came from the sacrifice of Christ. The sacrifice of animals still pointed forward to that sacrifice; but the blood of the animals themselves didn't save anyone. The blood of animals didn't save anyone in the Garden of Eden, and it didn't save anyone in the temple, either. The only difference was that the symbols and ceremonies made the plan of salvation easier to understand and remember. Priests were chosen, whose only job was to maintain the worship of God in the way that the patriarchs had failed to do.

The laws that Moses wrote down weren't new laws—they were the same laws that had always existed. When Cain killed Abel, murder was against the law, even though it was not written down. The Sabbath was instituted in Eden—not on Mt. Sinai. The distinction between clean and unclean animals existed long before Moses wrote Leviticus and Deuteronomy. It is clear from the first four verses of Genesis chapter 7 that Noah knew the difference between clean and unclean animals.

The Lord then said to Noah, “Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation. Take with you seven of every kind of clean animal, a male and its mate, and two of every kind of unclean animal, a male and its mate, and also seven of every kind of bird, male and female, to keep their various kinds alive throughout the earth. Seven days from now I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights, and I will wipe from the face of the earth every living creature I have made.” [Genesis 7:1-4]

Genesis 8:20 tells us the first thing that Noah did when he got off the ark.

Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it [Genesis 8:20]

Noah knew what animals are clean hundreds of years before Moses wrote down the list. Moses didn't write down any new laws—he simply wrote down the laws that people had forgotten. The sanctuary service was instituted to preserve the memory of the spiritual laws that have existed since the creation of the world. The Jewish religion was the new human institution charged with keeping the true worship of God alive that the patriarchal system had failed to do.

Satan continually tried to separate the Jews from God, and was successful from time to time. So, God sent prophets to bring about revival. Sometimes it worked, and sometimes it didn't. In extreme cases God had to send His people back into captivity for a while to bring them back to Him. But all through the Old Testament, whether the Jews had good kings or bad kings, God always had some faithful members of His true, invisible church, who kept the faith regardless of what the majority of members of the institutional church were doing.

Near the end of Daniel's life, God sent Gabriel to tell Daniel that He had set a probationary period of 70 times 7 years for the Jews. Gabriel said that after 69 of those 7 years periods, God would send His Son, the Messiah, in person to judge them. Jesus came right on schedule, and found that, generally speaking, the Jewish leaders had failed to keep their religion pure. They did not recognize the fulfillment of prophecy when Jesus died on the cross to ransom the believers from the penalty of sin.

So, on Pentecost, God sent the Holy Spirit to establish a new religious organization to preach the eternal truths. The apostolic church was a new organization; but it wasn't a new religion. It was yet another reformation of the institution that God had been using to teach people the truth since the creation of the world. It did not need animal sacrifices to promise the future atoning sacrifice of Jesus because that sacrifice had already been made.

Satan attacked the church, and over the centuries managed to introduce many destructive heresies. One way Satan did this was by using anti-Semitism to get the church to change the day of worship from Sabbath to Sunday, thereby causing Christians to unintentionally break the Fourth Commandment every week. Satan also caused the Christian church to adopt pagan Roman customs in the guise of unifying the church. In the process, the Roman myth about what happens to people when they die was used as a way to raise money by selling indulgences, and introduce the worship of saints into the church. The blasphemous notion that the church has the power to send people to eternal bliss in heaven or eternal torment in Hell, and that people can influence their eternal destiny by praying to saints or by bribing priests, led directly to the Protestant Reformation. The Reformation did not create a new church—it removed false doctrines that had infiltrated the church, and brought God's people back closer to God.

Satan continues to pull people away from the true religion through the guise of unity. It is good to be united in truth; but there is no virtue in unifying truth with error. Satan still tries to separate the Protestant church from the pure religion of the Bible by introducing popular, secular ideas that are inconsistent with God's law and plan of salvation. Jesus warned us about this in Matthew 24.

Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.

"Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. [Matthew 24:4-14]

Jesus goes on to tell more about what will happen at the end of time; but let's not let that distract us from Jesus' statement that, "At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people." Many false teachers have deceived sincere Christians, and turned them away from the faith. He said, "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many." Don't fall victim to those deceptions.

We Christians have a weapon powerful enough to defeat Satan's tricks. We have the Bible. It exposes Satan's lies. It protects us from false doctrines which separate us from God. We will talk about how to use that power after this short musical break.

[music – “The Church's One Foundation”]

Part 3

Before the break we said that God's True Church is eternal, and therefore existed before any religious denomination was established. The True Church is not uniquely bound to one particular denomination. The Bible is the standard of faith, practice, and worship. The closer a denomination is to the teachings of the Bible, the closer it is to God's ideal.

For the most part, denomination differences consist of inconsequential things such as the order and style of worship, the type of music to be used, the organization of the church, details associated with the business model of the church, *et cetera*. Satan can exploit these differences in such a way as to distract the church from The Great Commission that Jesus gave her in Matthew 28:18-20

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”[Matthew 18:18-20]

Notice that the commission includes more than just baptizing. The purpose of the church isn't just to get the most names on a membership roll—teaching is a requirement as well. Of course that includes teaching abstract principles such as salvation, righteousness by faith, forgiveness, sanctification, justification, and so on. But teaching encompasses more than just theoretical doctrines. Jesus said, “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” We Christians have a responsibility to lead society in the path of righteousness. Judging from the condition of society today, we need to do a better job of that.

I am shocked by how acceptance of immorality has increased just in my lifetime. I graduated from high school in 1966. Back in those days, some teenage girls got pregnant and had to drop out of school—but not many. And when they did, it was a major scandal. Good girls didn't do that. Some girls might have been easier to kiss than others. And there was some bragging in the boy's locker room when a girl let a boy slip his hand inside her blouse. But none of my classmates claimed that a girl let him “go all the way.” It is a good bet that every girl in the University High School Class of 1966 graduated a virgin.

But that was about the time when they started teaching sex education in high schools. It was taught from the point of view that teenagers are going to have sex, so let's teach them how to do it without pregnancy or a venereal disease. Some schools have now even gone so far as to give students free condoms. Society now accepts teenage sex as normal and inevitable. The result has been a lot more premarital sex and unwanted pregnancies.

Just because nobody gets pregnant or a venereal disease, it isn't OK for kids to have sex. It is bad enough when someone you have kissed dumps you; but when you break up with someone with whom you have shared the ultimate intimacy, the betrayal can leave lasting scars. It can be hard to love and trust again.

Christian churches should be shaping the opinion of society. We should be taking a strong stand against premarital sex. Some churches are. But, unfortunately, some of our churches are letting society influence

church values, rather than influencing society to accept Christian values. Members of the True Church will take a strong Biblical stand against fornication.

Have you noticed how many women claim the title, “single mother,” as if it were some sort of badge of honor? They proclaim their status as if we should admire them for their strength and virtue. Single motherhood isn’t something one should aspire to—it is a tragedy! Some women are single mothers because their husbands were killed serving in the military, or died in an accident, or their husbands died young from natural causes. That’s a tragedy. Some women are single mothers because they gave themselves to men who were just seeking pleasure and had no intention of marrying them or fulfilling their fatherly responsibilities. That’s a tragedy. Some women are single mothers because they married irresponsible men who left them after they became pregnant. That’s a tragedy. Some women are single mothers because they were such bad wives they drove their husbands away. That’s a tragedy. There is nothing good about being a single mother. It’s terrible for the mother, and terrible for the children. But secular society accepts it as natural and normal. Society says it is nothing to be ashamed of; nothing to worry about.

We Christians have a responsibility to change society’s attitude toward single motherhood. Churches need to encourage a moral responsibility that will reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock births as much as possible, and care for the widows and orphans with the compassion that Jesus demands. The astounding number of welfare mothers testifies to the failure of the churches in this area.

Divorce used to be viewed as a social stigma. Divorce was seen as a failure. Divorce has terrible emotional consequences on both parties, and even greater consequences upon their children (if they have any). Divorce should be avoided at all cost. Problems in a marriage should be fixed as soon as they arise, and not be allowed to escalate to the point where divorce is considered. But secular society has accepted divorce as normal, and many churches have gone right along with it. The popular culture should not be shaping the churches’ values. It is the job of the churches to uphold the sanctity of marriage. We don’t seem to be doing a very good job of it. Marriage has lost its sacredness and permanence in the eyes of secular society and the church.

Marriage has become so meaningless that the concept of gay marriage is gaining popularity. God’s True Church should be fighting vigorously against gay marriage. But homosexuality is so widely accepted by secular society that many churches are afraid to take a stand against it. They don’t want to be accused of discrimination. Some churches even take pride in their “inclusiveness” because they ordain gay priests and perform gay marriages. Is Jesus proud of churches that are afraid to take a stand against homosexuality? Does God’s True Church support homosexuality? Certainly not! We need to stand up for morality, no matter how unpopular that stand is.

Society still condemns pedophilia; but for how long? The more we hear about teachers having sex with their students and coaches having sex with their players, the more likely society is to come to accept it as normal. If it is OK for a man to have sex with a man, why isn’t it OK for a man to have sex with a boy? And if it is OK for teenagers to have sex with each other, why isn’t it OK for a hot female teacher to teach some of her male students the right way to do it? Why are we denying pedophiles the “right” to have sex with children?

Hopefully that foolish reasoning sounds shocking to you; but consider how often the term “gay rights” is used today. Forty years ago the notion of “gay rights” was as ridiculous as the notion of “pedophile rights” is today. But, no doubt, it won’t be long before someone tries to equate pedophile rights with civil rights in the same way as they associate gay rights with civil rights.

Have you noticed how gay people are celebrated on TV? Practically every new comedy has a gay theme, and nearly every reality show has a gay contestant. And, of course, we are required to call them “gay.” There was a time when they were called “queer.” But anyone who calls a gay person “queer” today will immediately be called a “homophobe” or a “bigot” because using a disrespectful name is terrible and should never be done—unless, of course, the disrespectful name is “bigot” or “homophobe.”

That’s how Satan makes sin appear acceptable—he makes sin appear to be virtuous. People defend homosexuality as if they are the ones holding the moral high ground. They claim it is a civil right. How can any good person be against another person’s civil rights? How can anyone deny “a woman’s right to choose?” Once one accepts the notion that a woman has the right to kill her unborn child, how can anyone be against abortion? As soon as society decides adults have the right to have sex with children, then the tide will turn, and the people against pedophilia will become villains.

If it is discriminatory not to allow two men to marry each other, why is it not discriminatory to prohibit a man from marrying his sister, or his mother? Why isn’t incest a right? Just wait. The time is coming when it will be—if the churches don’t take a stand against sin.

God says, “Thou shalt not steal.” But when a sports team wins a championship, it seems to be an excuse for fans to celebrate by going downtown and looting stores.

God says, “Thou shalt not kill.” So why is the murder rate so high in some places?

A lot of crimes are committed under the influence of drugs and alcohol. There’s no doubt that these chemicals suppress inhibitions, making it easier to sin. Should not God’s church be fighting against drug and alcohol abuse?

There was a time when church ladies went into bars with their axes, smashing liquor bottles. That’s clearly wrong. Prohibition seemed like a good idea at the time; but history proved that it wasn’t. It isn’t the church’s job to get laws passed against drugs and alcohol. That just sets the stage for government to take control of people’s lives. More laws aren’t the answer.

Instead, the churches should be educating people about sin, teaching them not to do it. If people didn’t want to smoke marijuana, it would not matter if selling it is legal or not. If nobody smokes marijuana, there doesn’t need to be a law against it. If people are convinced that homosexuality is a sin, then they won’t engage in it, and there doesn’t need to be a constitutional amendment against gay marriage. If women are horrified at the thought of murdering their unborn children, *Roe vs. Wade* becomes irrelevant. When people know that fornication and adultery are sins, then the problems of teen pregnancy, abortion, divorce, and pedophilia go away without any government intervention.

It is easy to blame modern society for all the sin and depravity in the world today; but we would not have to blame society if we Christians were doing our job. We, as individual Christians, can’t do much; but we can do something. You can encourage your congregation to take a strong stand against sin. Then your congregation can encourage other congregations in your denomination to join your congregation, so that the entire denomination takes an equally strong stand against sin. Then your denomination will be in a position to encourage other denominations to take a similar stand. If all Christian denominations were united against sin, we could reform society.

You may argue that your congregation doesn’t have any power to influence society; and that might be true. If it is true, it must be because your church doesn’t have the Holy Spirit. If your church has the Holy Spirit, then your church does have power. If your church doesn’t have the Holy Spirit, there must

be a reason why it doesn't. Is your church powerless because it has become so corrupted with worldly values that God no longer wants to have anything to do with it?

Does God not answer the prayers of your church? If He doesn't, I'll tell you why He doesn't. Actually, God will tell you why He doesn't, through the word of the prophet, Isaiah.

When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow. [Isaiah 1:15-18]

Are you satisfied with the power of your church? Is your church successfully fighting against Satan? Is the Holy Spirit doing great things through your church? If so, praise God. But if it isn't, why not? Is God ignoring your church because you are ignoring God? Is your congregation part of God's True Church? Is your church faithfully following Jesus?

Your congregation can have the power of the Holy Spirit, and can make a difference in the community. The key is revival. The closer you come to Christ, the more power you will have.

Christ is revealed in the Bible—the whole Bible. Study the Bible, and pray that the Holy Spirit will lead you into the truth that is revealed in the Bible. Then, and this is the really hard part, accept that truth and live according to it. The attributes of God's True Church are clearly and consistently revealed in the Bible. If you want to be part of God's powerful True Church, your congregation needs to conform to the teachings of the Bible, regardless of present popular opinion or past church tradition. Jesus said,

You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life. [John 5:39-40]

Take Jesus at His word. He is found in the Old Testament and the New Testament, but Satan has misrepresented Jesus character and teaching. Search for the errors that Satan has introduced into your denominational teaching and reject those errors. Make it the goal of your congregation to purify your church as much as possible. Then the Holy Spirit will give your congregation the power to take that pure message to the world. Jesus said,

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. [Matthew 5:13-14]

God's True Church isn't one particular denomination. The True Church is any church that doesn't hide the light. It is the one that accepts and preaches the everlasting Gospel, which was revealed from the first verse in Genesis, and remains unchanged all the way through the Bible to the last verse of Revelation. God's True Church doesn't ignore parts of the Bible because they are unpopular, and doesn't accept popular doctrines that conflict with the Bible.

You can be an individual member of God's True Church no matter which denomination you belong to, if you believe and live in accordance with all of God's teachings. Your whole congregation can be part of

God's True Church, if it rejects traditional errors that Satan has introduced into your church, and wholeheartedly follows Christ.

God is sending you and your church into a hostile society, to tell a truth that many people don't want to hear. But God isn't sending you alone. He is sending the Holy Spirit with you to guide you, strengthen you, and comfort you. So let's close our broadcast as Kimmie Witzel and JoAn Witzel perform, "So Send I You."

[music – Kimmie Witzel & JoAn Witzel, "So Send I You"]