

# Become Part of the True Church of God

by Rod Reynolds

There are many Churches that claim to be Christian. The claim to be a Christian Church implies that its teachings are consistent with the teachings of Jesus Christ, and that Christ's example is followed by the Church making the claim.

It ought to be obvious to anyone who seriously considers the matter that not all Churches that claim to be Christian really are following teachings consistent with the teachings of Jesus Christ found in the Bible. Some have wondered, "How can I be a part of the true Church of God?" I want to answer that question in this article.

Some may think expressing love for Jesus is all it takes. Or making a profession of faith in Christ. But emotion alone is not a reliable measure of how one stands before God. Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). And, "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him" (John 14:21).

Jesus said, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed" (John 8:31). As *Vine's Expository Dictionary* explains, the Greek word for "disciple," μαθητής (*mathetes*), denotes "one who follows one's teaching." *Vine's* goes on to comment on the meaning of this word, "A 'disciple' was not only a pupil, but an adherent; hence they are spoken of as imitators of their teacher."

We are instructed to follow the example of Jesus Christ, to follow in his footsteps: "For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, **leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps**: 'Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth'" (1 Peter 2:20-22).

Jesus said, "And he who does not take his cross and **follow after Me** is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:38). And, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and **they follow Me**" (John 10:27).

So a true disciple of Jesus Christ **follows the teachings of Jesus Christ**, as preserved in Scripture, and also **follows his example of obedience to God**. It's said of Jesus Christ, "He humbled Himself and became **obedient** to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8). Jesus said, "And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for **I always do those things that please Him**" (John 8:29). He also said, "I do not seek My own will but the **will of the Father** who sent Me" (John 5:30). Jesus said to his disciples, "**If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love**, just as I have **kept My Father's commandments** and abide in His love" (John 15:10).

So true disciples of Jesus will follow his example in keeping the commandments, that is, the word, of God, because Jesus taught, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4). Jesus said, "...the Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). The word for Scripture is the Greek word γραφή, (*graphe*),

which means in this context, the written word of God as recognized by Jesus Christ and those he taught and ministered to.

"Bind up the testimony, Seal the law among my disciples" (Isaiah 8:16). Jesus said to his disciples, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me" (Luke 24:44). These are the divisions of the written word of God as recognized among the Jews at the time of Jesus. The "Psalms" in this context was a division of the Old Testament Scriptures that was also called the *Hagiographa*, or holy writings, consisting of not just the book of Psalms, the first and largest of the several books of the Old Testament that were a part of it (cf. *Barnes' New Testament Notes*, or *Adam Clarke's Commentary* or similar sources for details). Jesus acknowledged that the Scriptures contained in the Old Testament as preserved by the Jews are authoritative, and they are the word of God.

Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:17-19).

Stephen was "a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit" (Acts 6:5), who was ordained a deacon in the Church by the apostles. As Stephen stood testifying before the Jewish Sanhedrin, he said of Moses, primary author of the first five books of the Bible, the section called the "Pentateuch," or the "Law," that he was "the one who received the living oracles **to give to us**" (Acts 7:38).

Note, the writings of Moses were recognized by the true Church of God as "living oracles," that were given not only to the Jews, but also to the Church of the New Testament. The word "oracles" used in this verse means in this context the words of God. The apostles of Christ recognized the written word of the Old Testament as authoritative for the Church.

The Apostle Peter wrote of Scripture that it is "the word of God which lives and abides forever" (I Peter 1:23). He wrote, "...no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (II Peter 1:20-21).

The true Church of God is not identical with any human organization of men. It consists of those whose names are registered in the Book of Life in heaven. The Church is described in the New Testament as "the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven" (Hebrews 12:23), described further as those "whose names are in the Book of Life" (Philippians 4:3).

It should be understood that in a human Church organization, even if it is generally seeking to teach and practice the Christianity of the Bible, there may be a mixture of converted and unconverted people. Jesus warned of false prophets. "Beware of false prophets, who come to

you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves" (Matthew 7:15). He warned that "...many false prophets will rise up and deceive many" (Matthew 24:11).

The Apostle Paul warned of "false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ" (II Corinthians 11:13). He also wrote of "false brethren" among those in the Church (II Corinthians 11:26; Galatians 2:4).

The Apostle Peter warned the Church, "But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction" (II Peter 2:1). He also warned the Church to beware of "unstable people [who] twist to their own destruction" Paul's epistles, "as they do also the rest of the Scriptures" (II Peter 3:16).

Note that Peter regarded as Scripture, in other words, as the inspired word of God, the epistles of Paul preserved in the New Testament. By the end of the first century A.D., all the New Testament writings had been completed that were recognized as authoritative by the Church of the Apostles. These documents, written in Greek, were, along with the Old Testament writings preserved among the Jews (Romans 3:2), the only writings recognized by the true Church as Scripture, or the authoritative word of God. The New Testament Scriptures were preserved among the Greeks as the Old Testament Scriptures had been preserved among the Jews.

That does not mean, of course, that all Jews, even of the scribes who were used to preserve the Scriptures, were truly converted (cf. Romans 3:1-4). Nor were all, or even most, Greeks converted, even though the Scriptures of the New Testament were preserved by scribes among them.

The Apostle John warned, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (I John 4:1). Jude, a half-brother of Jesus according to the flesh, and a leader in the early Church, wrote, "For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ" (Jude 1:4). He said of them, "These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear" (Jude 1:12).

In the prophetic messages to the Churches of God in Revelation chapters two and three, Jesus gave warnings to the Church, such as, "I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan" (Revelation 2:9). "Jews" as used in this context would apply not only to literal physical Jews, but also, and especially, those who claim to be Jews spiritually, in other words, who claim to be Christians. The Apostle Paul had written, "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God" (Romans 2:28-29).

Jesus said of the Pergamos Church, "But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.

Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth" (Revelation 2:14-16).

To the Church of Thyatira Jesus said, "Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols" (Revelation 2:20). To the Sardis Church Jesus said, "You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy" (Revelation 3:4). To the Laodicean Church Jesus says, "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent" (Revelation 3:18-19).

The book of Revelation also prophesies the emergence of a great false Church, symbolically called "Babylon the Great," speaking blasphemies and committing spiritual harlotry, and persecuting God's true servants.

There are certain identifying marks, however, of those who are truly converted, and of those Church organizations, at least some of whose members may be a part of the spiritual body of Christ.

Members of the true Church of God obey God's commandments, practice the faith of Jesus Christ, and are guided in their beliefs and behavior by his "testimony," that is, his word, the Bible. Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, **you who practice lawlessness!**' Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and **does them**, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and **does not do them**, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall." (Matthew 7:21-27).

Jesus said, "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and **do not do the things which I say?**" (Luke 6:46). The true Church is described as those "who **keep the commandments** of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 12:17). And "those who **keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus**" (Revelation 14:12). Those who will be a part of God's Kingdom when the plan of salvation is consummated are described as follows: "Blessed are those who **do His commandments**, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city [the 'New Jerusalem'] (Revelation 22:14).

Churches and individuals who profess belief in Jesus Christ, but who reject the commandments of God, who reject God's word in favor of human devised traditions, and refuse to obey him, are not part of the true Church of God. Samuel the prophet said to Saul,

the king of Israel, "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in **obeying the voice of the Lord**? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams" (I Samuel 15:22).

"To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20). "Therefore the Lord said: 'Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths And honor Me with their lips, But have removed their hearts far from Me, And their fear toward Me is taught **by the commandment of men**, Therefore, behold, I will again do a marvelous work Among this people, A marvelous work and a wonder; For the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, And the understanding of their prudent men shall be hidden'" (Isaiah 29:13-14).

Jesus admonishes us, "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many" (Matthew 24:4-5). Note they would come in his name, professing him as the Christ, and yet **deceiving many**.

Paul wrote to Timothy, "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, **having a form of godliness** but denying its power. And from such people turn away!" (II Timothy 3:1-5).

He went on to say, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood **you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus**. 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" (II Timothy 3:12-17).

We're warned that there would be occasions when sound doctrine would be rejected in favor of fables, or falsehoods, false teachings. Indeed, that's been more often the rule than the exception. To Timothy Paul wrote, "I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because **they have itching ears**, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they **will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables**" (II Timothy 4:1-4).

Paul warned against "giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth" (Titus 1:14). He spoke of those who, "profess to know God, but **in works they deny Him**, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work" (Titus 1:16).

Peter warned of false prophets, as we read earlier, and he said, "...many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed" (II Peter 2:2).

An angelic being who appeared to John told him that he was a fellow servant of "those who **keep the words** of this book" (Revelation 22:9). Christ adds a warning near the end of the book of Revelation: "For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Revelation 22:18-19).

The sense of this is that we are not to add human devised traditions and requirements of a religious nature to the word of God, claiming that these are of equal or greater authority than God's word, as the Pharisees did. As also various Churches claiming to be Christian Churches have done, by substituting for God's word various customs and traditions, usually borrowed from heathen, idolatrous traditions. Nor are we to declare null and void the instructions of the word of God, as for example, some do, by suggesting the ten commandments of God do not apply to Christians, and are "done away."

For an explanation of how some instructions apply differently under the "New Covenant," in contrast to the "Old Covenant," see our articles, which we hope to publish as a booklet, on "The Two Covenants."

Many have been deceived into following a false Christianity which does not follow teachings and practices consistent with God's word. Satan has deceived all nations, including multitudes in traditionally "Christian" nations.

"Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor **handling the word of God deceitfully**, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age [Satan] has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them" (II Corinthians 4:1-4; cf. *Barnes' New Testament Notes* for explanation of verse 4 reference to "god of this age"). All too frequently the word of God has been handled deceitfully, and its message shrouded in confusion by false teachings.

Scripture speaks of "...the great dragon..., that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who **deceives the whole world...**" (Revelation 12:9). The Bible reveals a "beast," which is a figurative expression for a series of powerful earthly kingdoms. "Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea [a metaphor of masses of humanity, cf. Isaiah 57:20; Ezekiel 26:3; Daniel 7:2-3; cf. *Barnes' New Testament Notes* and *Adam Clarke's Commentary*, et al], having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name. Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority" (Revelation 13:1-2). Note that the power and authority of this great empire, which has dominated the world for much of its history, is from Satan, the

“dragon,” as he’s called here and also in Revelation 12:9 and elsewhere. Most who have been a part of that system have not been aware that they were deceived.

Associated with the “beast” is a “great harlot.” “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 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” (Revelation 17:1-5). Churches are spoken of figuratively as women various places in the Bible. This is a great false Church, with daughter Churches. And of this religious / political system, it says: “by your sorcery all the nations were deceived” (Revelation 18:23).

Becoming a part of the true Church of God requires a spiritual conversion. Genuine spiritual conversion involves a process of first learning fundamental truths of the Bible, including coming to understand what sin is, heartfelt repentance of sin, as evidenced by conduct, and baptism in accordance with Biblical instructions.

Moses said to the people of Israel: “Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should **act according to them** in the land which you go to possess” (Deuteronomy 4:5). It says of the righteous king Jehoshaphat, and the leaders who served with him, “So they taught in Judah, and had the **Book of the Law** of the Lord with them; they went throughout all the cities of Judah and taught the people” (II Chronicles 17:9).

Jesus gave the command to the leaders of his Church, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 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” (Matthew 28:18-20). They were to teach repentance, as Peter and the other apostles did on the day of Pentecost following Jesus’ death and resurrection. Peter told the crowd on that day, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

Note that he did not suggest they make a mere profession of faith, and continue living as they always had. Repentance, among other things, requires forsaking false religion, and coming out of it. Paul in Athens told an audience, “Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now **commands all men everywhere to repent**, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead” (Acts 17:29-31). Paul and Barnabas in Lystra told the worshipers of idols there, “We... preach to you that you should turn from these useless things

to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them" (Acts 14:15).

To those enmeshed in the false Babylonish system of this world, God says, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues" (Revelation of John 18:4). One cannot continue on the path of religious deception and idolatrous customs and meet God's approval as a part of his true Church. It requires separating oneself from those things.

It also requires a lifelong commitment to continue seeking God, learning from his word, and obeying him. Jesus said, "But he who endures to the end shall be saved" (Matthew 24:13). Paul wrote that God, "...will render to each one according to his deeds: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality," but "indignation and wrath" to those who "do not obey the truth" (Romans 2:6-8).

These requirements are discussed in further detail in our article "Should You Be Baptized?" It's available on our website, [cogmessenger.org](http://cogmessenger.org).

Salvation is open to anyone willing to seek God and make a commitment to faith and obedience towards him. Anyone willing to make that commitment and follow through can be a part of the true Church of God.

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