

Find and Remain in the True Church — Part II

by Rod Reynolds

Are you a member of the true Church? How many true Churches are there? What is the true Church? How can you know if you are in the true Church? And if you are in the true Church, how can you stay in the true Church of God? These are questions every person who desires to be a genuine Christian faces. We should know the answers. Not knowing the answers has already put the salvation of many in jeopardy, and can put your salvation in jeopardy. A good deal of misinformation has been propagated concerning the matter of being in the Church and how it relates to our standing before God. Years ago, in the midst of an apostasy being engineered by the leaders of a Church of God fellowship, people were told that God called them into a particular corporate Church body, and that's where he expects them to stay. Individuals have said, "God called me into this Church," meaning a particular corporate organization, "and this is where I'm staying."

Is that what God called us into? Is that true?

Others have said, "Mr. X (you insert the name) is God's anointed, so whatever he says I'll follow. And to leave the Church [perceived as a human corporate organization] is rebellion against God's anointed." Is that true? Is a particular religious leader God's anointed? Is leaving the corporate Church led by such a leader rebellion against God's anointed? In the midst of wholesale doctrinal changes members of what had been purported to be "God's Church" were told "God will never leave you nor forsake you," the implication being he will never leave you nor forsake you if you remain attached to a particular corporate Church organization. Is it true that God makes an unconditional promise never to leave nor forsake us if we simply remain attached to a particular corporate body, or follow a particular leader, who may claim to have some exalted office, or some special relationship with God?

In a previous article, I addressed these questions primarily from the perspective of a Church organization. We learned that we are not called into a Church organization of this world, but our baptism is into Jesus Christ, and his death.

We ended with the conclusion that, "Wherever an assembly of God's true Church is, it will be walking in his ways, and keeping his commandments." In this article, part 2 of "Find and Remain in the True Church" I intend to focus more on leaders who claim the loyalty of people who have believed their claims to authority in the name of Jesus Christ. What is your obligation in evaluating the claims of any would be leader? Should you follow someone based on his claims to be an "apostle," or a "prophet," or "evangelist," or some other exalted office.

Many have fallen prey to leaders who make such claims. How can you avoid deception, and be sure the leaders with whom you choose to associate are genuine?

As mentioned earlier, the first article of this series ended with the conclusion that, “Wherever an assembly of God’s true Church is, it will be walking in his ways, and keeping his commandments.”

The Sabbath command was given to help us remember who is the true God, and that it is he who makes us holy. “Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: ‘Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you’” ([Exodus 31:13](#)). If we reject the Sabbath, or any of God’s holy ten commandments, or other commandments as applicable in the New Covenant, we will forget the true God. “Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today” ([Deuteronomy 8:11](#)). To reject even one of God’s commandments is, in principal, to reject them all. “For whoever hath kept the whole law, and yet hath offended in one point, hath become guilty of all” ([James 2:10](#)).

The context make it clear that James was referring to the ten commandments, and ancillary laws. “If indeed ye fulfill the royal law, according to the scripture, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,’ ye do well. But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever hath kept the whole law, and yet hath offended in one point, hath become guilty of all. For he who said, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ said also, ‘Do not kill.’ [Examples from the ten commandments.] Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou hast become a transgressor of the law. So speak, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty” ([James 2:8-12](#)).

If anyone rejects the commandments of God, he is in doing so rejecting God. Notice: “Then the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah...who...said, Thus says God: ‘Why do you transgress the commandments of the Lord, so that you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the Lord, He also has forsaken you’” ([2 Chronicles 24:20](#)). When anyone forsakes the commandments of God as applicable under the New Covenant, he is forsaking God.

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Some apostate leaders, quoting and misapplying [Hebrews 13:5](#), have assured brethren that God “will never leave you nor forsake you,” the implication being, as long as they remain attached to a particular corporate body. Yet in this very verse, as well as the overall context, Paul relates this promise to our conduct. He quoted the promise from [Deuteronomy. 31:5-6](#), where it is placed in the context of Israel overcoming her enemies in accordance with God’s commandments. He said, “The Lord will give them over to you, that you may do to them according to every commandment which I have commanded you. Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you” ([Deuteronomy 31:5-6](#)).

But the promise that God would not leave nor forsake them was conditional. In this very context God warned Israel that when they forsook him and broke his covenant then he would forsake them. God spoke to Moses and said, “Behold, you will rest with your fathers; and this people will rise and play the harlot with the gods of the foreigners of the land, where they go to be among them, and they will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them. Then My anger shall be aroused against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide My face from them, and they shall be devoured. And many evils and troubles shall befall them, so that they will say in that day, ‘Have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?’” ([Deuteronomy 31:16-17](#)).

In the New Testament, too, we are warned against denying or forsaking God through disobedience: “They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work” ([Titus 1:16](#)). The the Greek *arneomai*, translated deny in this verse in the NKJV, according to Strong’s Concordance and other sources, means “to contradict, i.e. disavow, reject, abnegate [renounce]: deny, refuse.” In practical terms to deny God is to forsake him.

Turning God’s grace into license to break his law is also denying, or forsaking God. “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 licentiousness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ” ([Jude 1:4](#)). Just as God rejected Israel when they forsook him through disobedience to his word, he will forsake us, individually or collectively, if we do the same: “If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us” ([2 Timothy 2:12](#)). If we forsake God through rejecting his commandments then we have effectively left the true Church of God. To remain part of the true Church, on the other hand, we must, as God’s word instructs, reject leaders who turn from God’s law.

Some have become convinced that some particular individual, usually making extravagant claims about himself, is “God’s anointed,” and that hence they must follow him no matter what. Actually, all of God’s true ministers are “anointed,” in the sense of having been set apart by the Holy Spirit to their offices. But all are free moral agents. Any can disqualify himself.

Paul knew that he could become disqualified. He wrote, “But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” ([1 Corinthians 9:27](#)).

If Paul could become disqualified, anyone could. Satan was God’s anointed, an archangel, until he sinned. Then he was cast out as profane from God’s presence. “You were the anointed cherub who covers [among the highest ranking of the angels]; I established you; You were on the holy mountain of God; You walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones. You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, Till iniquity was found in you. By the abundance of your trading You became filled with violence within, And you sinned; Therefore I cast you as a profane thing Out of the mountain of God; And I destroyed you, O covering cherub, From the midst of the fiery stones” ([Ezekiel 28:14-16](#)). Saul was anointed king over Israel “Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on his [Saul’s] head, and kissed him and said: ‘Is it not because the Lord has anointed you commander over His inheritance?’” ([1 Samuel 10:1](#)). But because of Saul’s disobedience to God he was later rejected as King. Samuel said to Saul, after he had repeatedly failed to be faithful, “Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He also has rejected you from being king” ([1 Samuel 15:23](#)).

And there are many similar examples in the Scriptures. The true “anointed One” to whom we must always be faithful regardless of cost is Christ, our Messiah, our “anointed One.” He is the supreme “anointed of God,” according to God’s word: “You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You [Jesus Christ] with the oil of gladness more than Your companions” ([Hebrews 1:9](#)).

We are to test those who claim the mantle of apostleship, or of being ministers of Christ. Those who are false apostles or false ministers are deceitful, and speak lies. The Apostle Paul wrote of “false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ” ([II Corinthians 11:13](#)). Jesus Christ speaking to the Ephesus church, said “I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars” ([Revelation 2:2](#)).

The standard by which we judge is God’s word. God’s word is truth. Jesus said in prayer to God, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” ([John 17:17](#)). “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” ([Isaiah 8:20](#)). We place ourselves in jeopardy if we follow leaders who lead us into error. “For the leaders of this people cause them to err, and those who are led by them are destroyed” ([Isaiah 9:16](#)). Why do you think we are warned so many times in Scripture to be vigilant and wary?

We are sanctified, made separate from the world, by the Holy Spirit and belief in the truth: “But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord,

because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth” ([2 Thessalonians 2:13](#); compare [John 17:17](#)). That is what makes us a part of the true body of Christ—not clinging to an organization or some particular leader which or who rejects truth and openly endorses and encourages sin. True Christians are described in Scripture as those “...who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” ([Revelation 12:17](#)). And the saints, those sanctified or separated to God’s purpose, are described as “those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” ([Revelation 14:12](#)).

When Paul wrote, “But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased” ([1 Corinthians 12:18](#)), he was writing in the context of the different ways in which individual members can contribute to the work to which the body of Christ is called ([1 Corinthians 12:4-11](#)). He was certainly not recommending following into apostasy leaders who reject God’s word. “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills” ([1 Corinthians 12:4-11](#)).

In this same context, in fact, he emphasizes the unity of spirit characteristic of God’s true Church. “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit” ([1 Corinthians 12:13](#)). Whatever the particular station or role of anyone in the Church, we are to share the same Spirit, that is, the Spirit of God.

Paul warns against those preaching another Jesus. He warns of receiving a different spirit, or a different gospel. “For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted – you may well put up with it!” ([II Corinthians 11:4](#)). Or “... how well you put up with these things” (Bible in Basic English). “... then you listen too much” (Bible in Worldwide English). Paul is saying to them that ironically they are more willing to listen to false teachers all too often than to those who teach the truth. As Gill’s commentary remarks, they “receive his doctrine, submit to his authority, and prefer him to the apostles.”

A different spirit is now at work in the world, including the professed Christian world. It is a spirit that has led to mass confusion and profound disunity!

Should we follow someone merely because he claims the mantle of Moses, or who claims to be at the head of “God’s government”? Or who claims to be the Vicar of Christ? Moses was a type of Jesus Christ. He was not a type of any human leader of this age. Jesus Christ, not any fleshly human being, is the “Apostle and High Priest of our confession.” Christ is the “Son over His own House, whose house we are if we hold fast ... to the end” ([Hebrews 3:1, 6](#)).

There are ministers, or leaders of Churches, who claim that we can have access to God only through them. Yet, according to Scripture, our access to God is not through any merely human leader, “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus...” ([1 Timothy 2:5](#)). Don’t be deceived by anyone who accuses of rebellion those who remain faithful to the truth of God, and Jesus Christ, who is the Captain of our salvation according to Scripture ([Hebrews 2:10](#), KJV). The Greek for “Captain” here is ἀρχηγός (*archegos*), which could also be translated author, or chief leader. Jesus Christ far outranks any human leader.

“Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house. For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God. And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end. Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: ‘Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, In the day of trial in the wilderness’” ([Hebrews 3:1-8](#)).

“For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end” ([Hebrews 3:14](#)).

Here’s what you should do: If your leaders are faithfully following the teachings and example of Jesus Christ, follow them. Never put them in the place of Christ. But do as Paul instructed when he said, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” ([1 Corinthians 11:1](#)). The condition for continuing to follow (or imitate, as it is in the Greek) the example and teaching of human leaders is that they must be faithfully following Christ’s example and teaching.

But we are warned not to follow leaders who teach falsehood and depart from the truth. In warning of false teachers John wrote, “Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God” ([3 John 1:11](#)). The ministers of God are warned against departing “from the way,” causing others “to stumble at the law” ([Malachi 2:8](#)). We are warned that those who follow leaders who teach lies, causing the people to err, will be destroyed. “The elder and honorable, he is the head; The prophet

who teaches lies, he is the tail. For the leaders of this people cause them to err, And those who are led by them are destroyed” ([Isaiah 9:15-16](#)).

We are instructed, “Go from the presence of a foolish man, when you do not perceive in him the lips of knowledge” ([Proverbs 14:7](#)). We are urged to “note those who cause division and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you learned [that is, the doctrine preserved in Scripture], and avoid them ” ([Romans 16:17](#)). We are warned, “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. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed” ([2 Peter 2:1-2](#)). These are those who promise a false “liberty,” causing those who had escaped the pollutions of the world to become entangled in them again. “For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them” ([2 Peter 2:19-21](#)).

The burden is on us to weigh and to judge whom to follow. Jesus said, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves” ([Matthew 7:15](#)). He often warned his followers to beware of religious leaders. Paul warned, “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” ([Colossians 2:8](#), KJV). John wrote, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God...” ([1 John 4:1](#)). Jesus warned those of the Philadelphia church, “Behold, I come quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown” ([Revelation 3:11](#)). These are just a few of the many warnings in Scripture for us to check up, prove, and make certain that we follow the leadership only of those who are faithful to God’s word and his commandments.

If you would abide in the Church, abide in Christ. If you would abide in Christ, John gives us an outline to follow. John saw the teachings and example of Jesus Christ and the early Church being cast aside for doctrines more appealing to the carnal mind. John wrote: “Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father” ([1 John 2:24](#)). From the Scriptures we learn what was taught from the beginning, by Jesus Christ and the apostles, and the true prophets of God who preceded them. John was witness in his time to the same kind of freewheeling “Christianity” that we see in our day, characterized by the rejection of basic principles of God’s law and the substitution of man made ideas.

The idea of a “progressive revelation” that contradicts the teachings of Christ and the apostles and renders Scripture obsolete is a fiction of apostates who reject Christ’s teachings. Paul, the likely author of the book of Hebrews, wrote, “Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels

[messengers] proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?" ([Hebrews 2:1-4](#)).

To remain in the true Church of God requires that we abide in Christ. To abide in Christ we must keep his word. We must abide in the doctrine of Christ and the apostles revealed in Scripture. John wrote, "Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom [or which] He has given us" (1 John 3:24). And finally, "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ [note "doctrine of Christ," not any mere human leader] does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son" ([1 John 1:9](#)).

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