

Where is the True Christian Church Today?

*18 proofs, clues, and signs to identify the true vs. false Christian church.
Plus 7 proofs, clues, and signs to help identify Laodicean churches.*



Church of England



Church of Rome



Continuing Church of God

**Jesus said that His church would continue
(Matthew 16:18)**

Bob Thiel, Ph.D.

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Cover: Would Jesus' true church have steeples or use obelisks? All photos by Joyce Thiel, except Westminster Abby, which was public domain.

Jesus said the grave would not prevail against His church. Do you know where that church is today?

Are you sure? Are you willing to be a real “doer” Christian and not simply a hearer? Can you handle the truth about the true Christian church?

Could a small and maligned group best represent the true Christian church today?

Would you be willing to “contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints” or would you prefer a counterfeit? Should you rely on your emotions or the word of God to decide?

Will you really believe the criteria of the Bible? Do you know which proofs, signs, and clues identify the true and *Continuing Church of God*?

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1. Which Church Would Continue?

Thousands of Churches and Billions of People

There are thousands of groups with major doctrinal differences that claim to be part of Christ's church. Many of them are seriously talking about ecumenical unity. Two billion people are believed to be part of those churches. Is a massive church the true Christian church?

One fact, astounding, but true, is that although most people seem to assume that all claimed Christian churches get their beliefs and doctrines from the Bible, the reality is that nearly all the churches that claim to be Christian often rely on non-biblical and pagan traditions for their beliefs!

Almost none will teach the full truths from the Bible as that often goes against their comforting traditions, culture, and/or society.

Can you *really* identify the true Christian church? Would *you* accept the truth, even if it went against traditions and outside influences?

Are there easy proofs to help you eliminate false churches? If you are willing to open your mind and heart to discover these proofs, signs, and clues, the answer will be revealed and you will understand WHY it is critical to know where the true Christian church is today and why we must have the zeal to act at this point in God's plan.

Discover what the Bible teaches and find out for yourself. Welcome to your journey to the true Church of God.

Jesus Taught That His Church Would Continue

Jesus taught that His church would continue until the end of this age:

¹⁸... I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. (Matthew 16:18, New King James Version throughout unless otherwise noted)

¹⁸... I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. (Matthew 16:18, New American Bible, put out by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops)

¹⁸ "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ 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)

Neither death (Hades/the netherworld) nor time (the end of this age) will prevail against the true Christian church. Jesus' teachings prove that there must be a group (or multiple groups) that constitutes the true church throughout the entire church age. This church would teach all that Jesus commanded (Matthew 28:19-20) to those whom the Father would call (John 6:44) throughout the entire world.

Jesus also taught about the history of the true Christian church, in advance. He did this in the messages He gave to the churches in the 2nd and 3rd chapters of the Book of Revelation.

If the Bible, religious writings, and secular history can show what the early apostolic and faithful post-apostolic church believed, the only real candidates for that true church, throughout the church age, would be those who kept those same teachings and practices (cf. Jude 3).

Since the church age has not ended, as Jesus has not yet returned, the true church must exist. But where?

Despite the fact that there have been many apostates from the faith, there are really only two possibilities for Christ's true church in the 21st century: it is either a highly Greco-Roman influenced group of one or more churches, or it is a church or group of churches from some other, more truly apostolic and biblical, source (cf. Revelation 2, 3, & 17).

For those of us who believe the Bible, there are no other options. The only real candidate(s) for the true church would be one or more groups who still have the same teachings and practices today as the early apostolic church actually had.

The Bible Teaches to Prove All Things

Many do not carefully consider what church they attend. Many believe the claims of the ecumenical and interfaith crowds that all faiths lead to the same place. Yet, Jesus taught that broad approach (the "easy way") was the way to

destruction and only a few seekers would find the straight and narrow way in this age (Matthew 7:13-14, KJV).

Should you bother to prove whether or not your church is a true Christian one?

Most people accept whatever the dominant religion their family or local culture accept. Some, however, will make changes in their lifetime. Some changes are based upon emotion, some for convenience, and some on doctrine. Some pick a church where they feel the most comfortable. Others pick one based upon its proximity, youth and/or other social programs, or because somehow it could advance a career.

What should you do?

The Apostle Paul wrote (according to Protestant and Catholic accepted translations of the New Testament):

²¹ Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. (1 Thessalonians 5:21, KJV)

²¹ But prove all things; hold fast that which is good. (1 Thessalonians 5:21, Douay-Rheims Bible—DRB)

² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:2, NKJV)

² And be not conformed to this world; but be reformed in the newness of your mind, that you may prove what is the good, and the acceptable, and the perfect will of God. (Romans 12:2, DRB)

Have you proved where the true Christian church is today? If you think you may have, have you really used the criteria that the Bible uses?

When Did the Church Start?

To get a better idea of where the church is today, it would be a good idea to see where it began. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus said He would build His church “on this rock” (meaning Himself, Acts 4:10-11; 1 Corinthians 10:4) and would send the Holy Spirit (John 16:7; cf. John 14:26). When did this begin?

It began fifty-days after He was resurrected.

The Christian church began on the Day of Pentecost c. 31 A.D., which is when the Holy Spirit was sent. Notice the following from the second chapter of the Book of Acts about how the Church of God started:

¹ When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place... ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2:1,4)

¹⁴ But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them,

¹⁴ "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words...²² "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know — ²³ Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; ²⁴ whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it...

³⁶ "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

³⁷ Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

³⁸ Then Peter said to them,

"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. ³⁹ For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

⁴⁰ And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." ⁴¹ Then those who gladly

received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. ⁴² And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers...⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:14, 22-24, 36-42, 47)

God was adding to the church daily. Notice those in it were to repent and be baptized. Thus, only those who could do both were added to the true Christian church. Notice that the faithful continued in the apostles' doctrine. These clues can help you understand the difference between the true church and those that merely claim to be Christ's church.

What is the Church?

The New Testament word translated as "church" comes from the Greek term transliterated as "ekklesia," meaning "a called out assembly." The Bible also teaches that the church represents Christ's body:

¹⁸ And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. ²⁴... Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church (Colossians 1:18, 24)

So, in our quest for the true church, we are looking for a body of faithful believers that have continued with the faith and teachings of Jesus and His original apostles. The church is a "spiritual house" (1 Peter 2:5), and is not limited to one physical organization or corporation throughout history.

What is a True Christian?

A true Christian is one who has accepted the call to Jesus, properly repented, been baptized, and actually received God's Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). Of course, many who are not true Christians claim that.

Notice also that the Apostle Paul wrote that a Christian has the Spirit of God dwelling within them and that they will lead a different type of life than those who do not:

⁹ But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he

is not His. ¹⁰ And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

¹² Therefore, brethren, we are debtors — not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. (Romans 8:9-14)

Those who do not really have the Spirit of God are none of His.

Christians are to love and show love, but not be spotted by the world:

²⁷ Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world. (James 1:27)

The Apostle Peter wrote:

¹⁷ You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; ¹⁸ but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen. (2 Peter 3:17-18)

Changing one's life through spiritual growth is an important part of being a real Christian. Also, true Christians realize that the true faith has been “spoken against everywhere” (Acts 28:22), its leaders have been subject to denouncement from other religious ‘authorities’ because of their teachings and education (Acts 4:1-21;6:9-14), and that real Christians themselves will be subject to persecution (John 15:20).

The late Church of God evangelist Dibar Apartian wrote:

It Takes Courage to Be a True Christian!

The prophets of old were men of courage. When God told Joshua to begin the battle to enter the promised land, He commanded, "Be

strong and of a good courage" (Josh. 1:6) . . .

The apostles were also men of courage, particularly after they received God's Holy Spirit. It wasn't easy for them to preach the Gospel amid continuous threats and persecutions. They had to choose between obeying God and obeying man — between entering the large gate and the narrow one. They were told by the authorities, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us" (Acts 5:28, RSV). The answer Peter and the other apostles gave was one of faith and courage: "We ought to obey God rather than men" (verse 29).

Do you realize that someday you may have to give the same answer to those who persecute you?

Hebrews 11 is generally known as the faith chapter. And talk about faith it does. All of the people mentioned therein lived by faith, but that required much courage. (*Good News*, January, 1981)

The true Christian church has existed since Pentecost in Acts 2, as Jesus said it would (Matthew 16:18; Revelation 2 & 3).

Yet, simply finding the true Christian church is not enough. One also needs to personally be a true Christian:

²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. (James 1:22)

³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. (Matthew 6:33)

True Christians have God's spirit, practice their faith, are courageous, and long for the kingdom of God. (More about living as a true Christian is included in our free booklet at www.ccog.org, *Christians: Ambassadors for the Kingdom of God, Biblical instructions on living as a Christian.*)

The true Christian church continues to teach that and the other aspects of the original faith (Jude 3).

2. Signs Identifying the True Church

Now that we have seen that the true church must continue, and keep the original faith, we will now look at some specific signs, clues, and doctrines that help identify the true church.

Sanctified By the Truth—The Word of God

Jesus said the sign that set apart true Christians was that they were sanctified by the truth:

¹⁶ They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. ¹⁸ As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth. (John 17:16-19)

A real key to distinguish the true Christian church from many of the counterfeits is how committed the church truly is to the word of God. Most who profess Christ are part of churches that get some or much of their doctrine from pagan and other sources that are in conflict with the word of God. Human-devised religions with false humility are not of real spiritual value (Colossians 2:23).

While some prefer to trust their emotions to determine an appropriate church, the word of God sets a different standard—God’s:

⁵ Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths. ⁷ Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the Lord and depart from evil. (Proverbs 3:5-7)

²⁵ He who is of a proud heart stirs up strife, But he who trusts in the Lord will be prospered. ²⁶ He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, But whoever walks wisely will be delivered. (Proverbs 28:25-26)

It is the truth from the word of God that can make humans spiritually complete (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Notice also the following:

⁴ For the word of the LORD is right, And all His work is done in truth.
(Psalms 33:4)

⁸ "For I, the LORD, love justice...I will direct their work in truth, And will make with them an everlasting covenant. (Isaiah 61:8)

God's work is done in truth, and the church leading that work under Christ must be doing it in truth.

God's ministers are commended by "the word of truth" (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:4-7), not for holding to traditions of men that conflict with scripture (cf. Mark 7:6-8; Matthew 15:3-9). The really faithful Christian church puts the word of God above traditions for doctrine.

As did Peter and the other Apostles, leaders of the faithful Christian church must be willing to preach the truth even when it is unpopular with governmental or religious authorities (Acts 5:27-32).

What is the Biblical Name of the Church?

A clue to the true Christian church is the name.

The predominant biblical name of the true Church in the New Testament is normally translated as "Church of God" (Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 10:32; 11:16,22; 15:9; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:13; 1 Thessalonians 2:14; 2 Thessalonians 1:4; 1 Timothy 3:5,15).

Although some have suggested that "catholic church" was the original name, it should be stated that the first time the term "catholic church" is believed to have been used was not referring to Rome. It was used in a letter by Ignatius of Antioch to the Church of God in Smyrna. He specifically addressed it "to **the Church of God ... the Church which is at Smyrna, in Asia**" (*Ignatius' Letter to the Smyrnaeans*, c. 120 A.D.). Groups like the *Continuing Church of God* (CCOG) are descendants of the Church of God in Smyrna. And unlike the Greco-Roman churches, we hold to the same teachings related to the Passover, Sabbath, millennium, Godhead, etc. that its early leaders had.

Throughout Christian history, the true church has normally used a version of the expression "Church of God" (or "the churches of Christ," cf. Romans 16:16) though often with another word with it (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:2; 1 Timothy 3:15). But God's Spirit, not a name, is the true criteria (1 Peter 2:5).

Therefore, merely having the right name is not necessarily a proof. Yet not having the right name would tend to be a disqualifying factor:

⁸ I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. ⁹ Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie — indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. (Revelation 3:8-9)

Jesus said the true Christian church does not deny His name, is made up of 'spiritual' Jews, has a little strength, and keeps Christ's word. But notice that Jesus was also clear that some who claim to be faithful would not be.

Why the Name “*Continuing Church of God*”?

Some of the world's churches have discovered the doctrinal point of truth about the biblical name for the Church. Some have adopted at least part of this name, and call themselves “The Church of God.”

However, it is important to realize that a name is supposed to convey meaning. And if the various “Churches of God” of this world are not recognizing God as their Ruler, are not completely subject to Him or His word, are not obeying Him, and do not have many of the other major proofs in this booklet— then, even though possessing the name utilized in Scripture, they are not part of the true Church of God.

This is consistent with warnings in the Bible that calls such people liars who are part of the “synagogue of Satan” (Revelation 3:10) as well as those about false ministers who appear to transform themselves into “ministers of righteousness” (2 Corinthians 11:14-15).

That being said, because a number of worldly organizations lay claim to the name of the true Church — just as millions of "professing" Christians have improperly laid claim to the name of Jesus Christ (Matthew 7:21-23)—when wanting to establish this phase of the true Church of God, for the purpose of conducting the business of God on this earth, we were unable to incorporate it as, simply, “The Church of God.” As that was not available, as well as to show our connection to the church from the beginning (Acts 2), we chose the term “*Continuing Church of God*.”

Contend Earnestly and the True Faith

An extremely important sign is that the true Christian church has the original faith that was delivered to the apostles and their appointees (cf. 1 Timothy 6:20-21).

Notice a problem that the Apostle Jude found and what he told faithful Christians to do about it:

³ Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. ⁴ 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 3-4)

Jude wrote about two groups. Those who would contend for the original faith that was once for all delivered to the saints, and those who were trying to change it inappropriately. The true Christian church has the delivered faith. A faith that is to continue—yet most who profess Christ in the 21st century really do not know what the original Christians actually believed and practiced (see also our free booklet, *Continuing History of the Church of God*).

That is a holy faith, keeping the love of God, and looking toward His mercy:

²⁰ But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹ keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. (Jude 20-21)

The Bible shows that true ministers are to preach the word and endure, not change, true biblical doctrines:

² Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. ³ 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; ⁴ and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. ⁵ But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. (2 Timothy 4:2-5)

Some of the fundamental doctrines in the Christian church are found in Hebrews 6:1-3. Those doctrines, including repentance, baptism, laying on of hands, going on towards perfection, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment, were taught by the apostles and early Christians essentially as they are now taught by the *Continuing* Church of God.

Notice something Jesus taught about the Philadelphia portion of the church:

⁷...to... the church in Philadelphia...⁸...you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name...¹¹ Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. (Revelation 3:7,8,11)

Jesus is teaching that one should keep to the biblical truths and not allow themselves to be misled by others who do not have the same commitment to God's word. The true Church of God is to hold fast to the biblical truths, not accept church councils that go against the true faith, nor be discouraged from doing the work because of men. In the 21st century, it is the remnant of the Philadelphia portion of the true Christian church that does this the best (see chapter 4 for some details).

Notice something from the Apostle John:

¹ That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life — ² the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us — ³ that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ And these things we write to you that your joy may be full. (1 John 1:1-4)

Notice that John said he taught what he learned from the beginning. The truth was not to change.

The Apostle John taught to *abide*, to continue, in the doctrine of Christ:

⁹ Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. (2 John 9)

One abides in that doctrine by not changing it with doctrines that contradict the Bible.

The Apostle John also reported about the difference between the faithful and those who claimed to be faithful:

¹⁸ Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. ¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. (1 John 2:18-19)

Notice that the Apostle John wrote that those who were faithful would have followed his teachings and practices, but those that were antichrists would not continue in those practices.

While there are many practices of original Christianity that have been lost by the Greco-Romans, perhaps it should be interjected here that one of the earliest documented changes from the practices and teachings of the Apostle John has to do with the date and observance of Passover. This was a change that various Greco-Roman churches introduced by the early 2nd century and it caused controversy (*Eusebius' Church History*, Book V, Chapters 23-24).

They refused to keep Passover on the 14th of Nisan as Jesus, the Apostle John, and various other faithful church leaders historically did (the bulk of those who refused the 14th switched to a Sunday). By the early 2nd century, Church of God Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna concluded that "many" had "false doctrine" and he referred to their faith as vanity/worthless (*Polycarp's Letter to the Philippians*).

By the early 3rd century, many of the Greco-Romans developed into what Church of God Bishop Serapion of Antioch referred to as a "lying confederacy" (*Serapion's Epistle to Caricus and Ponticus*).

Although the Greco-Roman churches *claim* both Polycarp and Serapion as their own (and Serapion apparently was succeeded in Antioch by unfaithful Greco-Roman leaders), the reality is that they (and those they faithfully associated with ecclesiastically) held to Church of God, and not Greco-Roman doctrines.

Although there were many other changes by the unfaithful churches, scholars generally agree that the Apostle John kept Passover on the 14th. Therefore, this

one doctrine is a way to easily tell those who listened to the scriptures, from those who failed to continue in the practices of the Apostle John and those with him. The changed Passover date to Sunday became universally decreed when the pagan emperor Constantine later forced the issue. Constantine was not a real Christian. Even when he had not been baptized into any professed Christian faith, he declared himself a lay bishop and forced the Sunday Passover issue to be finalized in the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. When Constantine died he was buried in a sun-god type of grave. Those who wanted to remain faithful to the biblical practice would not listen to him or his Council's decree. Constantine also had many murdered after Nicea.

Throughout history there have been two basic groups, one that held the original faith, while the other main one(s) that claimed to but did not.

What about 'apostolic succession'? Near the start of the 3rd century, the then Roman-supporting Tertullian wrote of two groups (Smyrnaeans and Romans) who claimed ties to the apostles (*Tertullian's Liber de praescriptione haereticorum*. Chapter 32), but only one of them was and has remained faithful and the other was not. One group claimed succession from Rome, and the other which claimed it from Smyrna (through the Apostle John to Polycarp to Thraseas, etc.), held Church of God, not Church of Rome, doctrines.

As far as apostolic succession goes, it may be important to realize that there is no instruction in the Bible about the true Church having a College of Cardinals nor a pontifex maximus. Both of those are remnants of paganism. According to *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, the title *Pontifex Maximus* was not adopted by Roman bishops until the late 4th century, whereas the College of Cardinals did not officially form until the 11th century. What Rome now does to select its top leader simply was not part of the original faith.

While the Bible shows that God does tend to work through a top human leader, this leader is one who has been anointed with oil (2 Corinthians 1:21; 1 Timothy 4:14; 5:22; 2 Timothy 1:6) and who shows the fruits that demonstrate that leadership (Matthew 7:15-20; 1 Timothy 3:1-7).

Perhaps it should be mentioned that it is only the true Church of God that can prove through early contemporaneous records that it had direct succession from the original apostles. Even Jerome noted that the Apostle John ordained Polycarp of Smyrna (*Jerome's De Viris Illustribus*. Chapter 17). The Greco-Romans tend to rely on late 'legends' for their claims about Peter and Mark (to

cite two examples), plus contradictory reports about Linus and Clement—furthermore they have changed doctrines. The ‘laying on of hands succession’ from the apostles has continued in the Church of God. Many more details about apostolic succession and the beliefs of the original Christian church are included in our free booklet, *The Continuing History of the Church of God*.

The Church of God Knew the Biblical Books from the Time of the Apostle John

Which Christian leader knew all books of the Bible from the time the last book of the New Testament was written?

Well, that would logically be the Apostle John. Not only is he believed to have been the last of the original Apostles to die, he also is believed to have written the last several books of the Bible, including the Book of Revelation (Revelation 1:9-19).

While the original apostles were still alive they could provide information that Christians needed to know personally and in writing. But notice that the intent (cf. Isaiah 8:16) was that the Bible would end up being sufficient for Christians to be spiritually complete:

¹⁶ All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,
¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Would not the Christian church that truly bases its doctrines on the scriptures know them from the earliest possible time (cf. Isaiah 8:16)? Or would it take centuries of humanly-convened church councils to debate the issue as the Greco-Roman churches have done?

Historical Evidence and Issues

There is an ancient document known as the *Harris Fragments* that says that the Apostle John passed “the canons” to a disciple of his named Polycarp (also known as Polycarp of Smyrna). Polycarp was not a Jew (his name is Greek), and probably was the most influential Gentile in the true Church of God in the second century. He was probably the most influential true Christian leader from 135 A.D. (when Jerusalem lost Judas, its last Jewish Bishop/Pastor) until his death a couple of decades later.

Polycarp's Letter to the Philippians quotes or alludes to all 27 books of the New Testament (*Polycarp's Letter to the Philippians with New Testament Scriptural Annotations. Trinity Journal of Apologetics, June 2008*). In a letter to his brother Onesimus, Melito of Sardis (a successor of Polycarp) directly and indirectly lists the 39 books of the Old Testament that we in the *Continuing Church of God* still use. And Melito's list does not include any of the so-called deuterocanonical books that the Roman and Eastern Orthodox Catholic churches now use.

There is also an Arabic document that essentially states that the faithful Christians in Jerusalem in the early 2nd century had all or part of the New Testament, but that the less faithful Roman-supporting professors of Christ there did not AND that they relied on non-inspired books (Pines S. *The Jewish Christians of the Early Centuries of Christianity according to a New Source, 1966*).

The Church of God from the time of the Apostle John in Patmos (Revelation 1:9) of Asia Minor (late first century) through to Polycarp of Smyrna (second century) had the entire canon of scripture. Yet, the Greco-Roman churches debated the books for centuries, and often included non-canonical ones in their New Testaments. It was only after consulting with those in Asia Minor and Jerusalem (including some in the Church of God) that the Greco-Romans were finally able to come up with the correct New Testament canon.

Would not the true Christian church know the entire canon from its earliest beginning?

The reforming Protestants, who came through Rome, did not finalize their canons until the 16th century, which is also when they started, as they had relied on various Roman lists before. Nor did the Church of Rome fully finalize its canon until the 16th century Council of Trent. Those books accepted in the Council of Trent included books of the Old Testament that their early leaders, such as Jerome (a doctor of their church), did not consider to be true scripture. Neither do current Protestants nor those of us in the true Church of God accept those additional texts as scripture.

For more information, the *Bible News Prophecy* magazine from the *Continuing Church of God* published two documented articles in 2013 explaining more details on the canonization of scriptures. Those magazines can be found at the www.ccog.org website, under the **Literature** tab button.

The True Church Knows the Truth About the Godhead

The true Christian church has always believed in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Early Christians understood that the Bible teaches the Father (e.g. John 6:27; Colossians 2:2) and Son (e.g. John 20:28-29; Colossians 2:2) were divine beings (Colossians 2:9) and that the Holy Spirit was the power of God that comes from the Father (e.g. Matthew 10:20) and the Son (Philippians 1:19).

In 381 A.D., the Greco-Romans officially adopted a different view of the Godhead (Romans 1:20; Colossians 2:9) regarding the Spirit's personhood. Although some Greco-Romans believed in the Spirit's "personhood" before, the majority of at least those "in the East," according to *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, had not accepted that nor the trinity, even a few decades earlier. This was a doctrinal change that the vast majority of Greco-Romans accepted. The trinity doctrine was also enforced by an Imperial Edict from the persecuting Emperor Theodosius (who essentially also decreed the then revised Greco-Roman faith as the faith of the Roman Empire).

The True Church Does Not Teach Lawlessness—It Upholds the Law of God

In the Old Testament, it was written that the laws of God would be a sign between Him and the faithful (Deuteronomy 6:1-8). While some Protestant leaders teach that the Ten Commandments were done away with, this was not the position of Jesus, His apostles, nor the early Christians.

Jesus warned that 'tares' (weeds) would be planted among the brethren by the enemy (Matthew 13:37-40). Jesus taught that the unfaithful would practice "lawlessness" (Matthew 13:41), but later be eliminated (Matthew 13:42). Notice something else that Jesus taught:

²¹ "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. ²² 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?' ²³ And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' (Matthew 7:21-23)

Jesus clearly is teaching that many would call Him "Lord" and even claim to have done miracles in His name, but that He would tell those who did so, but practiced "lawlessness" to depart. Thus, accurate prophecies and demon

exorcisms, of themselves, are not the signs to focus on as non-faithful groups sometimes have them.

The Apostle Paul reported that the “mystery of lawlessness” had already begun in his day (2 Thessalonians 2:7) and that people should not be deceived “with empty words” to get them to disobey (Ephesians 5:6). That “mystery” is manifested by the Greco-Romans when it comes to many aspects of God’s laws, like the Ten Commandments (they reason around them).

The true Church of God upholds God's law (1 John 5:1-3). It teaches that God set in motion laws, that if obeyed, would bring humanity much good, including abundant well-being and a productive full life. (See also our free online book: *The Ten Commandments: The Decalogue, Christianity, and the Beast.*)

The true Church of God proclaims that God’s law is not done away, but has been “exalted” and made “honorable” (Isaiah 42:21) and expanded by Jesus Christ (Matthew 5:17-48). Furthermore, obedience is tied in with salvation. The Apostles said that God’s Holy Spirit is given to them that “obey Him” (Acts 5:32). Jesus is “the author of eternal salvation to all who obey” (Hebrews 5:9).

The true Church of God teaches what the Bible teaches:

¹⁰⁵ Your word is a lamp to my feet
And a light to my path. (Psalms 119:105)

¹⁷² My tongue shall speak of Your word,
For all Your commandments are righteousness. (Psalms 119:172)

The true church teaches God's Ten Commandments are one of His greatest gifts to mankind and that His commandments are righteousness. Keeping them reflects love. “Now the purpose of the commandment is love” (1 Timothy 1:5).

While some of the Greco-Roman churches claim to believe that, through their acceptance of militaristic “Christianity” and other lawless doctrines, they have, like the Pharisees of old (Matthew 15:3-9), reasoned around the law of God to endorse practices and traditions that are contrary to it.

John the Baptist (Luke 3:14) and Jesus (John 18:36) taught against militaristic participation in this age. All real scholars realize that early Christians would not participate in carnal warfare. Church of God leaders such as Melito of Sardis wrote against it, while Theophilus of Antioch even wrote against Christians

even watching violent sports. The *Continuing* Church of God still teaches against militaristic participation and watching intentionally violent sports in this age.

Even though military participation was condemned as late as the 3rd century A.D. by the Roman Bishop and saint Hippolytus, within a century of his death, the Greco-Roman churches changed on this point. They later went so far as to offer “remission of sins” under the decrees of Pope Urban II in 1095 A.D. to those who would fight in warring religious Crusades.

Jesus said, “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). Yet, Greco-Romans endorse the use of various idols and icons that they venerate. The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:4-6) and the Apostle John (1 John 5:21) warned against that as did Melito of Sardis in the 2nd century.

Although the Book of Hebrews confirms that the seventh-day Sabbath is enjoined for Christians (Hebrews 4:1-9), most who profess Christianity reason around it.

The Apostle Paul warned that Satan’s ministers would deceptively appear to transform themselves into “ministers of righteousness” (2 Corinthians 11:14-15).

Ecclesiastical history, in and out of the Bible, shows that those who did so had success in deceiving many.

The True Church Was Persecuted, But Was Never the Persecutor

Jesus and the Apostle Paul taught that true Christians would be persecuted (Matthew 5:10-12; 10:23; 2 Timothy 3:12). While it is true that the Greco-Roman churches faced persecutions in their history, they differ from the true Christian church in that they also were often physical persecutors.

The non-militaristic in the true Churches of God throughout history have never been organized physical persecutors (though heretics and apostates who *claimed* to be part of them might have).

The Bible teaches that “Mystery Babylon the Great” was drunk on the blood of the martyred saints (Revelation 17:4-5), which it helped cause. The Bible teaches that seven-hilled based “Mystery Babylon the Great” was entangled

with the world's governments in an unholy alliance that God condemns (cf. Revelation 17:1-9,18; 18:1-10).

Because of compromise with carnal Roman and other leaders, the Greco-Roman churches not only implemented various economic persecutions throughout history, they also had true Christians killed for keeping the same practices as Jesus and His original followers had, such as keeping the Sabbath (Acts 13:13-15; 18:4; Hebrews 4:9), avoiding biblically unclean meats, and keeping Passover on the 14th.

Protestant 'reformers' also had people killed who opposed the non-biblical practice of infant baptism.

The Greco-Romans also persecuted Christians for holding to original biblical doctrines such as the truth about the Godhead, keeping the biblical holy days, refusing to accept idols/icons/crosses, objecting to pagan dress of Greco-Roman clergy, considering Rome represented end-time Babylon, teaching the kingdom of God, objecting to non-biblical 'sacraments,' and teaching the millennial reign of Jesus Christ.

It may also be of interest to note that there are actually Greco-Roman 'private prophecies' that teach the Greco-Romans will do this again in the end times.

The true Church of God has long been persecuted by those who claimed to be doing God's service. Jesus warned about this in John 16:2-4.

Outward Trappings and Appearance

Church historians realize that the original clergy (deacons/elders/ ministers/ presbyters/bishops/overseers) did not wear the type of unique identifying garments like many of those now used by the Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox clergy.

The original Christian leaders dressed like normal people. Jesus, Himself, had to be pointed out by Judas (Mark 14:43-46) as He was not dressed very differently than others. While one would expect a Christian leader to dress appropriately (cf. Matthew 22:11-14), the early leaders did not dress very differently from the general public.

The Greco-Roman clergy often wear the type of clothing that the priests for the sun-god Mithras wore. This type of dress was not adopted by the Roman

and Eastern Orthodox until they were influenced by the pagan Emperor Constantine in the 4th century (who was a follower of Mithras and even put Mithras' image on coins after his alleged conversion).

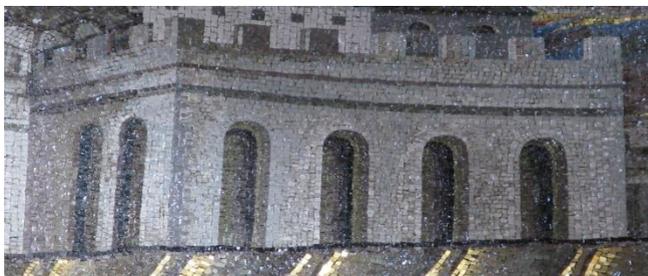
What about Protestant ministers? Well, some, like many of the Anglicans (Church of England), do wear the same type of garb as the Greco-Romans.

And others? Well, the white collar that many ministers wear did not come from the Bible. Though the modern reverse white collar was reported to have been invented in the 19th century, it has been claimed that sun-priests wore some version of them at least as far back as 1000 B.C.

The ministry in the churches of God do not wear the priestly collar like many of the Greco-Romans do.

What about church buildings?

It appears that the first specifically constructed Christian church building was built in Jerusalem out of bricks from the destroyed Jewish temple in the 70s A.D. Here is a 4th century mosaic representation of it:



Church of God on Jerusalem's Western Hill Called Mt. Zion

The above building is believed to have been constructed in the 1st century and looked similar to Jewish synagogues at the time. It had parapets for safety (Deuteronomy 22:8), but it did not contain crosses, obelisks, or steeples.

Crosses did not get adopted by the Greco-Romans for at least 150 years after Jesus was resurrected. The terms often mistranslated in the New Testament as 'cross' and 'crucifixion' actually mean 'pole' and 'impalement,' respectively, in the original Greek.

Steeple, like obelisks, were a phallic symbol as well as a symbol for pagan sun-

gods. Adding such symbols to a Christian building would be inappropriate for God's people (cf. Deuteronomy 12:29-32). Those truly in the Church of God do not place such symbols on buildings.

The same is also true of the use of gargoyles on Greco-Roman church buildings. Gargoyles are said to scare evil spirits away from the church. In the 12th century, the Catholic saint Bernard of Clairvaux was famous for speaking out against them as idolatry, yet many famous buildings (like the Catholic Cathedral of Notre Dame) have gargoyles on them.

While there can be a place for appropriately ornate places of worship (e.g. 1 Kings 6), there is a fictional story I would like to tell here. In one of the "Indiana Jones" films, several people were looking for the cup that Jesus allegedly drank out of during His last Passover (cf. Luke 22:20). One scene showed a table with numerous cups. It also showed various skeletons of people who came and tried the wrong cup—as according to the movie, choosing the wrong cup and starting to leave with it resulted in death. The lead character, Indiana Jones, after seeing the selection of cups, both ornate and plain, started to pick up an expensive appearing one. He then stated something to the effect of, "Jesus was a carpenter and His disciples were fishermen. There is no way He had a jeweled gold cup." So, Indiana Jones put down the expensive cup. He then picked the cheapest looking cup, which was the right cup according to the movie, and lived.

My point?

Although the Indiana Jones story is fiction, in real life some people place too much emphasis on outside appearance of buildings, television presentations, dress, etc. In both the Old and New Testaments, God makes it clear that He does not judge by outward appearance like humans do (1 Samuel 16:7; Matthew 7:21-23, 23:27-28). The Apostle Paul made it clear that although he was chosen by God (Acts 9:10-18), he was not a particularly good speaker (2 Corinthians 10:10). The same was true of Moses (Exodus 4:10-14) and Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:6). Paul, Moses, and Jeremiah are all better known for their writings.

Consider, also, that most Jews rejected Jesus as He was considered a peasant (cf. Luke 2:7) and did not come to fulfill their misunderstandings of scripture. Christians are encouraged to rightly divide the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15) and rely on scriptural criteria (John 5:39), which are God's criteria (cf. 2

Timothy 3:16), and not outside appearance (2 Corinthians 10:7-11), when attempting to determine who is speaking the truth faithfully and which is the true Christian church.

The True Church Preaches the True Gospel of the Kingdom of God

Jesus came preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God:

¹⁴... Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, ¹⁵ And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel. (Mark 1:14-15, KJV)

Jesus expected His followers to believe the gospel of the kingdom. He spoke about it in parables (e.g. Matthew 13:3-50; Mark 4:2-12; Luke 13:20-21) as many were not ready to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of God in this age (Mark 4:11; Matthew 13:10-11).

Jesus taught that His followers would be involved with the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom as well:

¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come. (Matthew 24:14)

¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ 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 28:19-20)

Preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God to the world as a witness means that we are to reach all nations with the kingdom message. And for those who may respond that God calls (John 6:44), we then strive to teach all that Jesus commanded.

After His resurrection, Jesus taught His disciples about the kingdom of God:

³...He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. (Acts 1:3)

The apostles later preached that same message of the coming world government of the Kingdom of God (e.g. Acts 19:8), as still does the *Continuing Church of God*. Preaching the gospel of the kingdom has brought persecution in the past and will also trigger a coming persecution according to numerous scriptures (Matthew 24:9-14; Mark 13:10-13; cf. Luke 21:12-19; Daniel 11:28-35).

The true and original gospel message is the one to be taught today:

⁶ I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, ⁷ which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. ¹⁰ For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ. (Galatians 1:6-10)

Many will not teach the message of the gospel of the kingdom as it differs from many traditions and preferences of men. Jesus is coming again to rule on the earth (cf. Luke 19:11-12; Matthew 6:10; Revelation 5:9-10; 20:4-6) and will bring the reward for His saints with Him (Isaiah 40:10; 62:11).

Sadly, instead of teaching what Jesus taught about the gospel of the Kingdom, many instead mainly teach about their version of the person of Jesus (see also our free booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom of God*). Some mistakenly promote the idea that international cooperation will bring about peace and prosperity on earth.

Additionally, many are telling people to turn to a version of ‘Mary’—that too is a false gospel (Galatians 1:6-9). The Bible teaches to turn to God (Joel 2:13; Acts 26:20), and church history shows us that the early Christians did not turn to nor venerate Jesus’ mother Mary (see also the free booklet, *The Continuing History of the Church of God*).

Was the True Church Supposed to be Large?

The Roman Catholic Church is the largest church with claimed ties to

Christianity. Although it does sometimes refer to itself as the “Church of God,” is its size proof that it is the true Church of God?

Or could a small group and/or collection of relatively small groups actually be the continuation of the true church?

In the 21st century, would Jesus’ true church be scorned by the world or be a major player highly involved in the world’s political scene?

Well, Jesus and the Apostles taught that the true church would be small:

³² Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. (Luke 12:32)

²⁷ Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, The remnant will be saved.

²⁸ For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, Because the Lord will make a short work upon the earth. (Romans 9:27-28)

⁵ Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. (Romans 11:5)

Jesus specifically taught that only a few would find the way to eternal life in this age as most would go the broad way that leads to destruction (Matthew 7:13-14; 20:16). He also taught that many would seek to enter, but not find it (Luke 13:24).

If a very small body of believers could be the true and most faithful church, does it not make sense that God is mainly working through relatively few during the church age? Most professing Christians apparently doubt that fact.

As prophesied, many have overlooked how God works (Zechariah 4:6-9; John 6:44) and “despised the day of small things” (Zechariah 4:10).

Could the True Church Remain in One City?

Was the headquarters of the true Christian church to remain in one city such as Rome or Constantinople? Multiple millions seem to think so.

Yet, according to the Apostle Paul, that was impossible. Notice what he wrote (one Protestant and two Catholic translations of scripture are shown below):

¹⁴ For **here we have no continuing city**, but we seek the one to come. (Hebrews 13:14, NKJV)

¹⁴ For **we have not here a permanent city**: but we seek that which is to come (Hebrews 13:14, Rheims NT).

¹⁴ **There is no permanent city for us here**; we are looking for the one which is yet to be. (Hebrews 13:14, New Jerusalem Bible, NJB).

Clearly Paul is teaching that there would not be a permanent city for Christians, until the city which is to come ("New Jerusalem" of Revelation 21:2). Thus, Paul is teaching that no human city, including Rome, could be a permanent headquarters' city for believers.

According to the New Testament, true doctrine (1 Timothy 4:16; 2 Timothy 3:14-16; Galatians 2:5; Colossians 1:21-23; Jude 3; Acts 14:21-22) and brotherly love (*filadelphia* in the original Greek, Hebrews 13:1), not a geographic location, are supposed to continue. The *Continuing* Church of God has continued with the original apostolic doctrines and strives to practice Philadelphian love.

Let us look further at what Jesus taught the future leadership of the church concerning location:

²²...and you shall be odious to all men for my name, but he that shall persevere unto the end, he shall be saved. ²³ And when they shall persecute you in this city, flee into another (Matthew 10:22-23, DRB).

²² You will be universally hated on account of my name; but anyone who stands firm to the end will be saved. ²³ If they persecute you in one town, take refuge in the next; and if they persecute you in that, take refuge in another. In truth I tell you, you will not have gone the round of the towns of Israel before the Son of man comes. (Matthew 10:22-23, NJB)

Christians are to persevere and continue in the faith. Jesus has not yet come and whatever Christians there have been in Palestine have been chased through all the cities in that geographic region since Jesus stated this (the

Crusades helped ensure this). Hence, Jesus was obviously referring to more cities than those that are in the area of Palestine. (By “cities of Israel” this includes the tribes of Israel that were scattered abroad per James 1:1 and not only those in the area commonly called Israel or Palestine for Christians to take refuge in.)

Therefore, based on what Jesus and the Apostle Paul taught, churches who claim a permanent city with apostolic succession for close to 2,000 years could not be the true Christian church. Yet, since history shows that the headquarters of the true Church of God has changed throughout the centuries from Jerusalem (Acts 2) to possibly in Antioch (Acts 11:26) to Ephesus to Smyrna to Europe (various cities) to various locations in North America, this is a sign that a group such as the *Continuing* Church of God (which is currently based in the Five Cities region of California) could be the true Christian church.

Thus, this lack of a “permanent city” is also a ‘proof’ that eliminates the so-called ‘apostolic sees’ of those churches who claim multi-century continuity in Rome, Antioch, Jerusalem, Alexandria, Constantinople, and elsewhere.

Perhaps it should also be mentioned that the Bible specifically condemns the ‘great city’ that sits on seven-hills (Revelation 17:9,18). Rome and Constantinople are considered to be ‘seven-hilled’ cities, where as the Five Cities region of California is not.

Sabbath Keeping Was Taught and Was to Continue

Although most who profess Christianity act like Sunday is the day of rest for Christians, that is nowhere taught in the Bible. Sunday, itself, entered the professing Christian world via compromises with pagan governmental authorities and pagan sun-god worship.

The Old Testament teaches that the seventh-day Sabbath was a sign between God and His people (Exodus 31:13-18).

But what about the New Testament? The New Testament clearly shows that Jesus (Luke 4:16, 21; 6:6; 13:10) as well as the Apostles and the faithful (Acts 13:13-15, 42-44; 17:1-4; 18:4; Hebrews 4:9-11) kept the seventh day Sabbath (which is called Saturday on English calendars).

Although some say that this day of worship was changed and was not intended

to remain for Christians, notice what the New Testament itself actually teaches (with one Protestant and two Roman Catholic translations shown below):

⁹ **There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God;** ¹⁰ for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. ¹¹ **Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience** (Hebrews 4:9-11, New International Version).

⁹ **There must still be, therefore, a seventh-day rest reserved for God's people,** ¹⁰ since to enter the place of rest is to rest after your work, as God did after his. ¹¹ **Let us, then, press forward to enter this place of rest, or some of you might copy this example of refusal to believe and be lost.** (Hebrews 4:9-11, NJB)

⁹ **Therefore there is left a sabbatisme for the people of God.** ¹⁰ For he that is entered into his rest, the same also hath rested from his works, as God did from his. ¹¹ **Let us hasten therefore to enter into that rest; lest any man fall into the same example of incredulity.** (Hebrews 4:9-11, The Original and True Rheims New Testament of Anno Domini 1582)

History shows that Sabbath-keeping was kept throughout history, despite condemnations by imperial authorities and councils of men. Sabbath-keeping spread from the original church in Jerusalem to Asia Minor, Africa, Europe and Asia in the early centuries A.D. Sabbath-keeping is documented to have occurred throughout the centuries and came to the Western Hemispheres no later than the 1600s.

Only a church that continued to keep the Sabbath until the 21st century could be the true church for the people of God according to the New Testament (Hebrews 4:4 shows this Sabbath rest is related to the seventh-day).

One reason that many today do not understand what the Holy Bible teaches about this is that certain translators have intentionally mistranslated the Greek term *sabbatismos* (σαββατισμός) found in Hebrews 4:9. The Protestant KJV and NKJV mistranslate it as does the CHANGED version of the Rheims New Testament, also known as the *Challoner version* (changed in the 18th century). All three mistranslate the word as 'rest,' whereas there is a different Greek term (transliterated as *katapausin*), translated as 'rest' in the New Testament.

Sabbatismos clearly refers to a ‘sabbath-rest’ and honest scholars will all admit that. Because of the mistranslations, most today do not realize that the seventh-day Sabbath was specifically enjoined for Christians in the New Testament.

The Holy Days and God’s Plan of Salvation

In Genesis 1:14, God states that He made certain lights (like the sun and moon) to mark off the holy days/religious festivals (*God’s Word Translation*), yet few who claim Jesus keep them.

God’s feasts and holy convocations are all listed in the Bible in the 23rd chapter of the book of Leviticus. They are the seventh day Sabbath, Passover, the Days of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Tabernacles, and the Last Great Day. While many moderns would call them “Jewish,” the fact is that Jesus, His disciples, and their early faithful followers kept them. Thus, they are kept by those in the *Continuing Church of God*. These biblical Holy Days point towards the first and second coming of Jesus and help show God’s plan of salvation.

Many moderns would be surprised to realize that early Christians expected that nearly all who ever lived would be saved and be part of God’s eternal kingdom. Even early Greco-Roman supporters such as Irenaeus of Lyon, Origen of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, and Ambrose of Milan taught at least portions of that doctrine.

Part of the reason that this doctrine was ‘lost’ was that fewer and fewer of the Greco-Romans would properly keep the biblical holy days, especially after they changed Passover in the 2nd century. Nearly all the holy days were condemned by Orthodox Bishop John Chrysostom, Emperor Theodosius (who declared the death penalty for those who would dare continue to keep the biblical date of Passover), as well as did the Council of Laodicea in the late 4th century. Statements, as well as persecutions, by the pagan Emperor Constantine earlier in that century, such as “Let us then have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd,” also played a role.

Another reason for the loss of knowledge of the plan of salvation was the condemnation of Origenism in the 5th and 6th centuries. While Origen had many flaws (even in his salvation understandings), he included in his teachings an opportunity for salvation for those not saved or incorrigibly wicked in this

age. The Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory seems to have been adopted as a non-biblical alternative sometime after Origenism was condemned (though the Eastern Orthodox and Protestants did not accept purgatory).

Traditionally, the Church of Rome and the Protestant churches have tended to teach that now is the only day of salvation and that all not saved in this age will burn eternally in Hades/Gehenna (although with the current ecumenical and interfaith movements going on this may change). The Eastern Orthodox have long had reservations about that, and have stated that God could save much of the rest of humanity at the time of the white throne judgment (cf. Revelation 20:11-13), but are not certain (Florovsky G. *The last things and the last events*. C. 1979. Missionary Leaflet # E95h Holy Protection Russian Orthodox Church. Los Angeles). Part of the reason for the Orthodox lack of certainty is that they do not truly keep the biblical holy days nor do they understand the true meaning that they have for Christians. God's Holy Days help picture God's plans for humanity.

We in the *Continuing* Church of God keep the same biblical holy days as Jesus, His disciples, and their faithful followers such as the Gentile-area Church of God leaders Polycarp of Smyrna and Melito of Sardis kept.

Keeping the biblical holy days reminds true Christians of God's true plan of salvation and grace. The *Continuing* Church of God understands how each of the holy days tie in with God's plan of salvation (see also our free booklet *Should You Observe God's Holy Days or Demonic Holidays?*)

The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus Christ was the Passover lamb sacrificed for us and that we are to keep that Feast with unleavened bread (1 Corinthians 5:7-8). The Days of Unleavened Bread help picture that we are to strive to put sin and hypocrisy out of our lives (cf. Matthew 16:6-12; 23:28).

Even the Greco-Roman churches recognize that Pentecost, also referred to as the feast of weeks (Leviticus 23:15-16) and the day of firstfruits (Number 28:26) in the Old Testament, had Christian significance. The idea of Christians being firstfruits is confirmed in the New Testament (James 1:18). In ancient Israel, there was a smaller harvest in the Spring and a larger harvest in the Fall. The Spring Holy Day Pentecost, when properly understood, helps picture that God is only calling some now for salvation (John 6:44; 1 Corinthians 1:26; Romans 11:15) with a larger harvest coming later (John 7:37-38; see also the free online book on the *Universal OFFER of Salvation, Apokatastasis*).

In general, the Greco-Roman churches do not keep the biblical holy days that occur in the Fall. If they did, they might better realize that the Feast of Trumpets pictures God's coming punishing interventions on the earth and the return of Jesus Christ via the seven trumpets of Revelation chapters 8 & 9 and 11:15-19. While Greco-Roman churches generally agree that the trumpets in Revelation have to do with those matters (some see these trumpets as allegorical), they see no reason to observe the biblical Feast of Trumpets.

The next Fall holy day is the Day of Atonement. In the Old Testament, this day included a ceremony where the Azazel goat was sent to the wilderness (Leviticus 16:1-10), whereas Christians saw this sending of the Azazel goat away pictures the time during the millennium when Satan would be bound for a thousand years in the bottomless pit (Revelation 20:1-4). This means that he will not be able to tempt and deceive during that time.

The Feast of Tabernacles pictures the spiritual and material abundance that will occur during the millennial reign of Jesus Christ when people will keep God's laws, without Satan's deceptions (Revelation 20:1-6). This is in contrast to what is happening now in a world deceived by Satan (Revelation 12:9). Satanic deception is part of why most who profess Christianity have been misled by false ministers (2 Corinthians 11:14-15).

The last of the biblical holy days (Leviticus 23:36b) is often referred to in Church of God circles as the Last Great Day. Notice what Jesus taught on it:

³⁷ On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸ He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." (John 7:37-38)

It is with the fulfillment of the Last Great Day that all who have not had an opportunity for salvation will truly have that opportunity, and nearly all will accept that offer.

Nearly all humans who ever lived will be saved!

The biblical truth is that, because of God's love, Jesus came to DIE FOR ALL:

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. ¹⁷

For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. (John 3:16-17)

So, did the loving God send His Son to die for a relative few or the world?

Protestants, who often quote John 3:16, tend to teach that the world *could* be saved but that the vast majority who ever lived will suffer in torment forever.

Is that the type of plan of salvation that a God who is all-knowing and is love would come up with? Does the Bible support the idea that everyone can be saved now? If not, is that fair?

Since God is all knowing and all powerful and is love (1 John 4:8,16), would God have predestined most who ever lived to eternal torment?

No.

Certainly, God is wise enough to have a plan that actually works.

Romans 9:14-15 states:

¹⁴ "What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! ¹⁵ For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion."

We know that God chose part of Israel in the Old Testament for salvation in this age, and few, if any, others. If that will be all, how is that love?

The Bible teaches that many have been intentionally blinded in this age (John 12:37-40). Those who were blinded in this age will still have an opportunity for salvation (cf. John 9:41; Isaiah 42:16-18). Notice also:

¹⁴ I will again do a marvelous work Among this people...²⁴ These also who erred in spirit will come to understanding, And those who complained will learn doctrine. (Isaiah 29:14,24)

There is no partiality with God (Romans 2:11). There will be an opportunity for all as "all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God" (Isaiah 52:10).

There is only one name under heaven by which humans can be saved (Acts

4:12) and that is Jesus Christ (Acts 4:10). Since most of humanity has never heard the truth about Jesus, and “all flesh will see the salvation of God” (Luke 3:6), there will be an opportunity for all to attain salvation (Isaiah 52:10, 56:1)—either in this age or the age to come (cf. Matthew 12:31-32; Luke 13:29-30). This future age comes after the second resurrection (as the true Christians of this age are raised at the first resurrection per Revelation 20:5-6) and includes the time of the white throne judgment (Revelation 20:11-12). Isaiah (Isaiah 65:20), as well as the Roman and Orthodox Catholic saint Irenaeus, taught that this particular age to come would be about one hundred years long.

The New Testament shows that the Apostle Paul observed biblical holy days (e.g. Acts 18:21, 20:6,16, 27:9; 1 Corinthians 5:7-8). Paul condemned incorporating pagan practices with biblical observances (1 Corinthians 10:20-23). Paul himself stated near the end of his life that he kept all the practices Jews needed to keep (Acts 28:17-19). That would have had to include observing all the holy days listed in Leviticus 23.

As a rule, the Greco-Roman churches do not follow the Apostle Paul’s admonition to imitate him as he imitated Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1), and they do not keep all the biblical holy days.

Instead, the Greco-Roman churches tend to keep days devoted to various pagan deities (Saturn, Mithras, Pan, Ishtar, Diana, Strenua, Janus, etc.) “repackaged” with outward trappings claimed to be Christian. The facts of history prove that early true Christians did not keep Christmas, Sunday, Valentine’s, Easter, the ascension of Mary, etc.

Would the true Christian church compromise with paganism (cf. James 3:13-17)? If not, why do most think that the compromising groups represent true Christianity?

Do most so-called Christian groups follow the practices of Jesus and the Apostles?

Certainly not the Greco-Roman-Protestant ones. Nor other groups such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (who have added additional books to the Bible), the Baptists (who claim they preceded the Reformation, yet share a lot of heretical doctrines with the Protestants), the Messianic Jews (who teach traditions of men similar to those Jesus condemned in Mark 7:6-13), and

the Jehovah's Witnesses (who deny the deity of Jesus Christ).

It is only among the Sabbatarian Church of God groups that keep the Holy Days that can begin to rightly claim to contend for the original faith and possibly be considered to have "Philadelphian Christians" at this time.

Resists and Condemns the Ecumenical and Interfaith Movements

Many religious and political leaders in the 21st century are promoting the ecumenical and interfaith movements. The ecumenical movement tries to consider that all professed Christian faiths are equal before God, yet the Bible warns about false ministers (2 Corinthians 11:14-15) and a false "Mystery Babylonian" faith that involves the world's political leaders (Revelation 17:1-9). Jesus did not come to bring international unity in this age, but division (Luke 12:51). Christians are to flee from the prophesied Babylon (Zechariah 2:6-7; Revelation 18:4) and be unspotted by the world (James 1:27).

More and more leaders are also promoting ecumenism, including in this an interfaith unity, which essentially tries to imply that all religions are equal before God. This is a blatant falsehood as it is only through the name of Jesus that any can be saved (Acts 4:10-12). Compromising doctrines, etc. for the purpose of unity is deceitful and wrong: *Cursed is he who does the work of the Lord deceitfully* (Jeremiah 48:10).

Those promoting ecumenical/interfaith religious unity do not seem to realize that both the Old and New Testaments teach that the true unity of the faith does NOT happen until after Jesus returns:

¹³ till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:13)

¹⁰ "Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion! For behold, I am coming and I will dwell in your midst," says the Lord. ¹¹ "Many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and they shall become My people. And I will dwell in your midst. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent Me to you. ¹² And the Lord will take possession of Judah as His inheritance in the Holy Land, and will again choose Jerusalem. (Zechariah 2:10-12)

Notice there is one true faith:

⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. (Ephesians 4:4-6)

That ONE faith is the true Church of God Christian faith, not some compromised, interfaith, ecumenical, Babylonian mishmash (Revelation 17) that Jesus will destroy (cf. Revelation 19).

As far as true Christian unity goes, the Bible shows that there will be divisions in the true Church of God (cf. Revelation 2 & 3) until Jesus returns.

While we in the *Continuing* Church of God believe that there should be cordial relations amongst all as much as possible (cf. Romans 12:18), that does not mean that we consider all religions as equivalent to the true Church of God, the true Christian faith. We also follow Jesus' example and will denounce those who rely more on tradition than the Bible (Mark 7:9-13).

Signs, Proofs, and Clues

In summary, here is a listing of signs, proofs, and clues that help identify the true Christian church as it:

1. Puts the word of God above traditions of men and hence has not added doctrines that are opposed to the Bible (cf. Matthew 15:3-9).
2. Uses the apostolic and biblical name "Church of God" (e.g. Acts 20:28; 1 Timothy 3:5).
3. Contends earnestly for the original faith (Jude 3), even under threats of persecution (e.g. Acts 5:27-32).
4. Traces its biblical doctrines throughout history (cf. 1 John 2:6).
5. Keeps Passover on the 14th of Nisan (Leviticus 23:5; Matthew 26:18).
6. Has known which books were part of the Bible since the time of the Apostle John (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Revelation 1:9-19; 22:18-19; Isaiah 8:16).
7. Teaches the truth about the Godhead (Romans 1:20; Colossians 2:2,9).
8. Teaches and keeps the loving laws of God (1 John 2:4).
9. Opposes participation in carnal warfare in this world (John 18:36; Luke 3:14).
10. Has been the persecuted, but never the physical persecutor (John 15:20-21; cf. 18:36).

11. Has not adopted the outward trappings of paganism in terms of ecclesiastical dress or buildings (cf. Deuteronomy 12:29-30).
12. Preaches the full gospel (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20), including striving for Gentile converts (cf. Romans 11:25).
13. Is a "little flock" (Luke 12:32; Romans 11:5; cf. Revelation 14:1-9).
14. Traces its physical location through multiple lead cities (Hebrews 13:14) and the seven churches of Revelation Chapters 2 & 3.
15. Has the sign of the biblical Sabbath (Exodus 31:13; Hebrews 4:9).
16. Understands God's plan of salvation through Jesus Christ as pictured through the Holy Days (1 Corinthians 5:7-8; James 1:18)
17. Teaches against the observation of pagan holidays (1 Corinthians 10:20-22).
18. Will not align with end-time ecumenical Babylon (Revelation 13:4-10; 18:4)

Only a Sabbatarian Church of God group meets all these criteria. The Greco-Roman churches do not truly understand God nor the plan of God nor do they represent the true Christian church.

Can you believe that?

Many will not, despite having the truth explained.

Consider the following prophecies from the Old and New Testaments:

⁵ Look among the nations and watch — Be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in your days Which you would not believe, though it were told you. (Habakkuk 1:5)

⁴¹ 'Behold, you despisers, Marvel and perish! For I work a work in your days, A work which you will by no means believe, Though one were to declare it to you.' (Acts 13:41)

Check out the scriptures and historical references in this booklet and believe the truth.

The Bible teaches that you are not to let family, traditions, societal pressures, or so-called intellectuals stop you (Matthew 10:37, 15:9; 1 Corinthians 1:26-29; 1 Timothy 6:20).

Act on the truth and do not be like those that will not believe the truth.

3. What Happened During New Testament Times?

Other than this opening paragraph in italics and the closing paragraph in italics, this chapter was written by the late former Church of God writer Dr. Herman Hoeh and was published in 1985. Dr. Hoeh gives his take on what happened to the true Christian church in New Testament times and the rise of the unfaithful churches often citing the KJV.

Christ said, "I will build My church" (Matthew 16:18). He did build it — one Church, commissioned to preach and to publish His Gospel — the very message He brought from God — to all the world.

But what do we find today? Hundreds of different and disagreeing churches, all founded by men, each professing to teach the truth, yet contradicting and disagreeing with all the others.

The Church in prophecy

While most people today suppose that the true Church was rapidly to grow big, to become a powerful organization, exerting powerful influence on the world, making this a better world, becoming the stabilizing influence of the world's civilization, actually Christ founded His Church for no such purpose. In His final prayer for His one Church, Jesus prayed:

"I pray for them. I do not pray for the world... Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are... I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world" (John 17:9-16).

Those of His Church are described as being strangers and foreigners in this world — ambassadors for Christ — which is foreign to this world — yet never being of the world.

This true Church of God was to be persecuted — scattered. "If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you," said Jesus to His disciples (John 15:20). "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (II Timothy 3:12).

On the night Jesus was seized to be crucified, He said, "It is written: 'I will strike

the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered" (Mark 14:27). After He, the Shepherd, was crucified, the "sheep" — His Church — were to become scattered.

Previously that same evening, Jesus had said to His disciples, "You will be scattered" (John 16:32).

This persecution and scattering began early. Notice Acts 8:1: "At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles."

Nowhere is there any prophecy that the one true Church should become great and powerful, exerting influence in this world. Rather, Jesus called it the "little flock" (Luke 12:32). Despised, persecuted, scattered by the world — separate from the world...

You haven't read much of the history of that Church. Even the historians have never known where to look for the true Church — for they do not know what the true Church is.

Broad majority deceived

On the other hand, in the world, all the prophecies foretold apostasy, deception and division.

Jesus foretold the very first event to come on the world — great deception — climaxing, in our day now just ahead, in great tribulation.

"Take heed," He said, "that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many" (Matthew 24:4-5, Authorized Version).

Notice carefully: It was not the few who were to be deceived, but the many. It was the few who were to become true Christians!

Jesus pictured this same condition when He said: "Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:13-14).

That isn't what the world believes, is it? Probably that isn't what you have heard and come to assume. But it's what Christ said. How deceived this world has become!

Satan is pictured in the Bible as the god of this world. He appears, not as a devil, but as a god — as an angel of light. And in Revelation 12:9, you read of "Satan, who deceives the whole world."

Yes, the many would come in Jesus' name, proclaiming that Jesus is the Christ — yes, preaching Christ to the world. And yet, without realizing it, deceiving the world.

Apostles knew what would happen

The apostles, instructed directly by Jesus Christ Himself, warned the Church about the departure from the faith that would begin to occur at the close of their ministry.

Scarcely 20 years after the crucifixion of Jesus, the apostle Paul, in one of his first inspired letters, cautioned Christians not to be deceived by false preaching or by false letters purporting to be from the apostles: "Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day [the time of God's intervention in human affairs, when Jesus Christ will return to rule the nations] will not come unless the falling away comes first" (II Thessalonians 2:3).

In Acts 20:29-30, the teacher of the gentiles explains how the apostasy would begin. He gathered the elders (ministers) of the Church at Ephesus to deliver them a final message concerning their responsibility over the local congregations. "For," said Paul, "I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things." Why? "To draw away the disciples after themselves." To gain a personal following for themselves. To start new denominations!

Do you catch the full significance of these two verses? The elders or ministers were especially assembled because, immediately after Paul would leave Ephesus, there would come within the local church congregations false ministers, wolves in sheep's clothing, to make a prey of Christians. And even from those elders already in the church congregations some would pervert the doctrine of Jesus to secure a following for themselves.

In instructing the evangelist Timothy, Paul instructed him to "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" — wanting to do what they please — "... they will heap up for themselves teachers" — encourage ministers who will preach what they want to hear — "and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (II Timothy 4:2-4). This was in the days of the apostles and evangelists. Many who fellowshiped in the local congregations of the early Church, after about two generations, did not endure sound doctrine because they had not really repented and therefore had never received the Holy Spirit. They followed teachers who, for the sake of money, pleased their wishes by preaching fables — the enticing fables of mysticism and sun worship that were engulfing the Roman Empire.

When Paul wrote his second letter to the gentile-born Thessalonians, he instructed them about the "mystery of iniquity" that "doth already work" (II Thessalonians 2:7, A V). Notice: Teachings of lawlessness were at work in Paul's day. The Roman world was filled with mystery religions that stemmed from the old sun worshiping mysteries.

Many of them found that by including the name of Jesus their following increased.

Jude had to include in his letter the admonition that every Christian should "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. 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.... These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit" (Jude 3-4, 19). They taught penance, not repentance. Jude says these preachers separated their followers from the body of believers.

By the time John wrote his epistles, he had this sad note to include about those who at first crept in unnoticed: "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us" (I John 2:19).

Although these numerous deceivers, called Gnostics, left the true Church, drawing away disciples after them, their following did not last for more than a

few centuries. There was, however, an even more dangerous apostasy that infiltrated the true Church.

True Christians forced out

Peter warned the churches that many would be misled. There were false teachers among Christians who would bring in heresies, "and many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of the truth will be blasphemed" (II Peter 2:2).

The letters of Paul were twisted to give another meaning than intended (II Peter 3:15-16). But instead of leaving the local congregations and forming their own sects, as others had done at first, these false preachers remained within the congregations and soon began to expel the true Christians.

In the letter of the apostle John to Gaius, we read: "I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church" (III John 9-10).

The true Christians, who alone comprised the true Church, were being put out of the visible, organized congregations!

These were the scattered ones of whom John said, "Therefore the world does not know us" (I John 3:1).

The name Christian was being borne away by leaders who crept into the fellowship of the Church of God, captured the local congregations and, in the name of Christ, deceived the many into following' their false teachings as if it were Christ's Gospel. (Hoeh H. Why So Many Denominations. Good News magazine, May 1985)

For more on the separations between true Christians and others who were not truly faithful, see our free booklet "The Continuing History of the Church of God."

4. Which Church of God is the Most Faithful?

Since the Church of God is the true Christian church, are all such groups the same? There are scores of groups claiming to be the Church of God (including, even, the Church of Rome) and many of them claiming to best represent the Philadelphian remnant of the Church of God.

How should you go about deciding which one? Are there proofs, clues, and signs to assist you?

Certainly, there are.

And while God calls people (John 6:44), He also gives them the ability to make choices. And choosing the right Church of God is very important. This is something that I have learned from experience.

Some Background

In my late teens, I realized that the true name of the true Church was “Church of God” as well as a few of the other proofs, clues, and signs in this booklet. Within a few weeks of moving out of my parents’ house, I happened to see a flyer that listed the location of a “Church of God” service that was held on a Saturday.

So, that Sabbath I attended what I believed would be a true Church of God service. Instead, after about possibly the 100th time the pastor said the name “Jesus” in vain (meaningless) repetition, I realized that this could not possibly be the biblical and true Church of God (cf. Matthew 6:7), so I walked out of the service.

From then on, I realized that it was important to pick the correct “Church of God” to fellowship with and support.

After learning more about the subject of the Churches in chapters 2 & 3 of Revelation, I also concluded that the most proper Church of God would be tied to the Church of God of Philadelphia that is discussed in Revelation 3:7-13.

Philadelphian Dreams and Beliefs

Various theologians have held to the position that the churches mentioned in the first three chapters of Revelation represented not only real churches, but

also an outline of seven 'eras' of history of the true Church from the time of the Apostle John to the return of Jesus Christ. The most faithful of those churches at the end, according to Jesus' words, was the Philadelphia portion.

The Philadelphia era was believed by some to have begun in 1933 under the human leadership of the late Herbert W. Armstrong (for more details on history, please see the free booklet *The Continuing History of the Church of God*) and that its predominance ended near the time of his death in 1986. According to the Bible, however, a remnant of that Philadelphia church still needed to exist until the end of the church age (cf. Hebrews 13:1; Revelation 3:10-11).

The formation of the Radio Church of God (which was later renamed the Worldwide Church of God) and the beginning of the Philadelphia era of the Church of God was preceded by a two-part proclamation dream that Herbert Armstrong believed God gave his wife Loma and that was subsequently confirmed (*The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong*, 1973, pp. 187,193-194). He believed he fulfilled what would be considered to be the first part of that dream (Armstrong HW. Brethren and Co-worker letter, November 28, 1956).

Similarly, the formation of the *Continuing* Church of God was preceded by dreams (two to Bob Thiel and another to Fesilafai Fiso Leaana) that were subsequently confirmed. We are also fulfilling the second part of Loma Armstrong's proclamation dream. No other true or major COG group that claims to lead the remnant of the Philadelphia portion of the COG has made those claims, despite the fact that dreams are promised to be a gift of the Spirit in the last days per Acts 2:17-18 (for more details, see *Continuing History of the Church of God*). Sadly, many Laodiceans act like the ancient Sadducees and will not accept how God works (Mark 12:23-32).

In his October 1979 *Plain Truth* article titled *7 Proofs of God's True Church*, the late Herbert W. Armstrong listed seven proofs that he felt the Philadelphia portion of the true Church of God would have. These included knowing/teaching 1) Who and What is God?, 2) The Government of God and Creation of Holy and Righteous Character, 3) Who and What is Man?, 4) The Truth About Israel, 5) The True Gospel, 6) What and Why the Church?, and 7) The Priority of Teaching of the Reign of the Kingdom of God. He felt that the, then, Worldwide Church of God had all of those. We in the *Continuing* Church of God do as well.

Specifically related to those we teach:

- 1) The view that early Christians had on the Godhead,
- 2) The government of God is hierarchical (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:28), with the Father as highest in authority and operates under His loving laws), and His goal of developing righteous character (Romans 5:4; Matthew 5:48) with doctrinal assistance to believers from His ministry (Ephesians 4:11-16),
- 3) That God intentionally created humans physically (Genesis 2:7) and that those He calls (John 6:44) can become spiritual (1 Corinthians 15:45-48) in the family of God (Ephesians 3:14-19),
- 4) The identity of modern Israel and how that ties in with prophecy (cf. Genesis 48, 49; 1 Kings 12:19-20; James 1:1; Jeremiah 30:7; Daniel 11:39),
- 5) Christ's gospel of the kingdom (Mark 1:14-15; Acts 1:1-3; see also our booklet, *The Gospel of the Kingdom of God*),
- 6) That the church does the work of God (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20; John 6:29; Revelation 3:7-13; Romans 11:25; 1 Corinthians 12:1-31; 16:9; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; Ephesians 5:25-32) in truth (Psalm 33:4; Isaiah 61:8; John 17:17; 2 Timothy 2:15),
- 7) The proper priority of proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom to the world as a witness (Matthew 24:14) and the soon-coming millennium (Revelation 20:4), while teaching disciples all things that Jesus commanded (Matthew 28:19-20).

Note: After the death of Herbert Armstrong, his human successor entered into apostasy and renounced most of the unique Church of God doctrines. The true church continued as many left that organization and many other organizations have since formed. Apostasy has happened from New Testament times (e.g. 1 John 2:18-19) and is one reason why tracing true Christian church history can be difficult.

While many Church of God groups have leaders that claim most or all of those seven points, nearly all have failed to truly practice Herbert Armstrong's points 2, 6, and 7, and have misunderstood some of the others. At least one group that believes it is a leader in 6 & 7 above, knowingly and intentionally, has made that proclamation with materials it knew contained doctrinal errors that were not the truth. That willingness to spread a false message shows that they are not leading the final phase of the work of God—the work of God MUST BE

DONE IN TRUTH per Psalm 33:4. The LORD said, "I will direct their work in truth" (Isaiah 61:8), and those who knowingly publish and distribute doctrinal errors obviously are not accepting the LORD's direction.

Many groups discount points 6 & 7. Yet, here is also something that Herbert W. Armstrong wrote related to points 6 and to parts of point 7:

In Matthew 28:19-20, God's order is 1) go and preach the Gospel (compare with Mark's version, same words of Jesus, Mark 16:15); 2) baptize those who repent and believe; then after that, 3) teach them to observe the commandments" (*Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong*, p. 523).

PURPOSE of the Church, 1) proclaiming the coming kingdom of God to the world and 2) feeding the flock.

The "loner"--the "individual Christian," who wants to climb up into the kingdom some other way than by CHRIST and HIS WAY through his CHURCH--is not being trained in CHRIST'S MANNER OF TRAINING, to rule and reign with Christ in his kingdom! (*Mystery of the Ages*, p.270).

Herbert Armstrong also taught, "with modern facilities for mass communication - the printing press, radio, television, even the telephone by which one may reach another in any part of the world in a matter of minutes or less - can reach more people by far than all of the first century apostles combined" (*7 Proofs of God's True Church, Part 6*. Plain Truth, August 1979).

We in the *Continuing Church of God* are utilizing 21st century methods for mass communication including the printing press, radio, YouTube television, the telephone, and, of course, the internet, which can even be faster than the forms of mass communication that Herbert Armstrong used. We have reached multiple millions with the gospel of the kingdom and have the type of proclamation and prophetic truths that Jesus said should be the criteria to know the true from the false in Matthew 7:15-18.

In terms of doctrinal truths, Herbert Armstrong wrote, "At least 18 basic and essential truths have been restored to the True Church since" the year 1933 (*Mystery of the Ages*, 1985). All those "restored truths" are in the official *Statement of Beliefs of the Continuing Church of God* (available online at www.ccog.org). That is not the case for most of the groups of whose leaders

were once part of the old Worldwide Church of God. Furthermore, most who claim to believe them do not even use the list that the late Herbert W. Armstrong actually gave (see his sermon titled *Mission of the Philadelphia Church Era*, given December 17, 1983), but instead rely on a list prepared after his death by a leader that did not hold fast to those Philadelphian teachings (God restored these 18 truths: How thankful are you for them? *Worldwide News*, August 25, 1986).

Jesus warned the Philadelphians to, “Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown” (Revelation 3:11), and this would seemingly have to include *the doctrinal truths* that were restored to the Philadelphia portion of the Church of God. The Bible also warns that people who seem to be believers will “fall away” from the truth and while that has happened in the past, it will again happen in the future (cf. Daniel 11:30-35; 1 Timothy 4:1). Some who once claimed to be Philadelphians have not held fast to that teaching either.

Most groups with leaders once part of the old Worldwide Church of God have not placed the public proclamation of the kingdom of God to the world as their true top priority (Matthew 24:14; 28:19), do not fully understand all of the restored truths, and have not valued the truth enough; hence they have shown that they are not the possessors of what has been called the “Philadelphia mantle” (leadership authority; cf. 2 Kings 8-14; Revelation 3:7-13).

The group with said mantle is also represented by the “woman” of Revelation 12:14-17, which also shows that not all real Christians have it. Perhaps it should be mentioned that the old Worldwide Church of God taught that the mantle would be taken from those that were unfit (*Prove All Things: Governance in the Church*. Good News, May 1986)—and the Laodicean leaders have, sadly, proven to be unfit.

The Book of Hebrews teaches:

¹ Let brotherly love continue. (Hebrews 13:1)

Why bring that up here? Because the word translated as “brotherly love” is the Greek version of the word *Philadelphia*. Philadelphia was to continue, even into this Laodicean time, as well as be present (to a degree) throughout the history of the Church of God. Philadelphians are deeply caring people. Philadelphians care for the poor and the unreached.

Notice two characteristics of the truly faithful church that the Apostle Paul wrote about:

¹⁵ ... the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. (1 Timothy 3:15)

¹⁵ Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)

The faithful Philadelphia remnant, the “woman” of Revelation 12:14-16, is the group that always strives to rightly divide (discern) the word of truth and is the pillar and ground of truth. The reason that I had to leave my prior Church of God organization is that they repeatedly broke promises and also, knowingly and intentionally, continued to send out printed information that they knew was not true (cf. Jeremiah 48:10; Psalm 33:4; Psalm 101:6-7; Isaiah 61:8) which is detailed in other places (e.g. www.cogwriter.com). Therefore, this persuaded me that they could no longer best represent the Philadelphia remnant of the Church of God and could not be used by God (cf. Isaiah 61:8; Psalm 101:7) to lead the effort to fulfill Matthew 24:14, etc. That is why it was necessary for the *Continuing* Church of God to form.

As far as the pillar and ground of truth goes, the *Continuing* Church of God has more depth and details about the history of the early Church of God than any other Church of God group. We are built on the foundation of Jesus Christ, the apostles, and the prophets (Ephesians 2:20). We teach more of what the early followers of Jesus taught than any other Church of God group.

We also have striven to teach ALL THINGS Jesus commanded in our sermons and in the media (cf. Matthew 28:19-20). To fulfill this literally, our English-language sermons (which are available online) have covered every statement Jesus is recorded to have made in the entire New Testament, plus we are working in getting this done in other languages as well.

We also devote a significant amount of our income to the poor (Galatians 2:10; Romans 12:13). Additionally, our prophetic explanations are in more depth, and more biblical, than any other known Church of God (cf. 2 Peter 1:19).

What About Prophecy?

Is prophecy important?

Certainly.

In his first recorded sermon, which happened after a miracle (Acts 2:1-11), the Apostle Peter tied news events in with biblical prophecy (Acts 2:14-40). Partially because people were aware of the events that Peter discussed, many paid attention and thousands were converted (Acts 2:41).

While miracles did not precede most of the other recorded sermons in the New Testament, speakers did try to tie events to prophecy and other parts of the Bible to better reach their audiences (e.g. Acts 17:22-31).

Furthermore, the Bible teaches, “Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10; see also our free online book: *Proof Jesus is the Messiah: Biblical, Prophetic, and Historical Facts*).

It may be important to realize that the first message that is recorded that Jesus preached (the gospel of the kingdom in Mark 1:14) and the last message Jesus gave (the Book of Revelation) were prophetic. Various messages that He gave (e.g. Matthew 24, Luke 21) were tied to upcoming world events.

Prophecy is a sign for believers:

²² Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers. (1 Corinthians 14:22, English Standard Bible)

²² Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe (1 Corinthians 14:22, NKJV)

The Bible shows there would be different types of tongues (1 Corinthians 12:28), and our volunteer translators and others in the *Continuing* Church of God help fill that. But notice that prophesying, which includes properly explaining prophecy, is supposed to be a sign for those who believe. We in the *Continuing* Church of God do understand and explain better many aspects of prophecy than other COG groups.

Does this mean that prophecy is the most important characteristic of the true Church? No, love is (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:1,8).

Yet, the pursuit of love is also tied in with prophecy in the Bible (1 Corinthians

14:1). Those truly having the love of the truth will be spared from some prophesied events according to 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12.

Today, massive societal changes are taking place. Many of them are prophesied in the Bible. Even though between perhaps one-quarter to one-third of the entire Bible is prophetic, most groups simply do not understand certain key prophecies in the Bible--prophecies that Jesus urged His followers in the end to understand (e.g. Matthew 24:15; Mark 13:14).

Some, despite claiming to believe the Bible, either discount or overlook prophecy. But that is not supposed to be the case for true Christians:

²⁹ "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. ³⁰ When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near. ³¹ So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near. ³² Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place. ³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

³⁴ "But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. ³⁵ For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man." (Luke 21:29-36)

Notice that Jesus taught that His followers will always have to pay attention to events and prophecies related to His return. Jesus repeatedly told His followers to watch for world events that would fulfill prophecy in other scriptures such as Matthew 24:42, 25:13; Mark 13:9,33,34,35,37, and Revelation 3:3. Jesus expects His followers to watch.

Jesus also taught that the Holy Spirit, "the Spirit of truth," would assist the faithful in understanding all truth, including prophetic ones:

¹² I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.

¹³ However, when ...the Spirit of truth, has come, {it} will guide you into all truth; ...will tell you things to come. (John 16:12-13)

Having the Holy Spirit and properly being led by the Holy Spirit helps us understand prophecy.

The Bible also teaches:

¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not despise prophecies. (1 Thessalonians 5:19-20)

Yet many, including those in the various Church of God groups, do not seem to believe that God's Spirit is currently working prophetically now. Many also tend to despise biblical prophecies and, often, their proper explanation(s).

Currently on this earth, God has His faithful and true servants who are correctly proclaiming the end-time prophetic warnings which need to go forth now.

The Bible teaches:

⁷ Surely **the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.** ⁸ A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken! Who can but prophesy? (Amos 3:7-8).

Despite this, as well as New Testament teachings on prophets (e.g. Acts 2:17-20; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Corinthians 14), most 21st century Church of God groups do not believe that there currently are any prophets and they badly misunderstand key elements of end time biblical prophecy.

Furthermore, all but one of the Church of God groups (CCOG is the one exception) who do accept that God has at least one prophet today, have listened to supposedly prophetic individuals who have clearly taught prophetic and doctrinal errors, hence they were/are false prophets.

The *Continuing Church of God* is the Philadelphia Leader

Those who wish to be part of the most faithful remnant of Philadelphia would want to be with a Church of God group that:

1. Makes proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom as a witness its top priority (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20; cf. Romans 11:25).
2. Supports poor brethren (Galatians 2:10; Romans 12:13; cf. James 2:14-16; Hebrews 13:16; Isaiah 58:7; Proverbs 28:27), including widows and orphans (James 1:27), particularly in poorer regions like Africa and Asia.
3. Truly practices biblical governance (1 Corinthians 12:28), including Matthew 18:15-17.

4. Has the proclamation, doctrinal, prophetic, and loving fruits Jesus spoke of (John 7:16-20; 13:35; Luke 4:18; 14:13; Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20; Revelation 3:7-13).
5. Warns those who think that they are in the Church to not fall away (1 Timothy 4:1).
6. Has spiritual gifts, including receiving many prophetic dreams, in the last days (Acts 2:17-18), which were later confirmed.
7. Best teaches that the reason God created what He did was so that eternity would be better (see the free book: *Mystery of God's Plan*).
8. Understands the historical and current roles of the churches of Revelation 2 & 3.
9. Explains and understands biblical prophecy well enough (e.g. Daniel 11:29-45; Matthew 24) to know when to flee (Matthew 24:15-20; Revelation 3:10, 12:14-16) prior to the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:21).

The one group that best represents the remnant of the Philadelphia portion of the Church of God (Revelation 3:7-13) in the 21st century is the *Continuing Church of God*.

Jesus warned the Laodiceans that they have a lukewarm work and need to repent or face the consequences (Revelation 3:14-22). On the prophetic side, the reality is that the Laodicean churches have a variety of prophetic misunderstandings.

Since Laodiceans represent the bulk of the Christians in the time of the end (they represent the seventh church or group of churches in Revelation 1-3), there must be reasons that they will not see all of what is happening prophetically and what will truly lead to the start of the Great Tribulation.

Within the Laodicean organizations that appear to be part of the Church of God, there are a variety of prophetic positions that are held which will prevent them from knowing when the Great Tribulation will begin.

Eighteen of those wrong views are listed below:

1. Many Laodicean groups do not officially teach and/or do not believe in the idea of Church eras related to the Churches of Revelation chapters 2 & 3 even though they sometimes teach about the churches of Revelation. Many take more of a preterist (past/historical) view of

those churches, despite the fact that many statements made to them had to have future prophetic ramifications (e.g. Revelation 1:19; 2:22; 3:3; 3:10). Because various groups do not teach certain prophetic aspects of this, many do not see their own problems and will have to go through the Great Tribulation.

2. The Laodicean groups do not believe that the Gospel of the Kingdom still needs to be preached to the world as a witness per Matthew 24:14, do not really make that a high priority, and/or do so in a manner which demonstrates they have insufficient love for the truth (cf. Jeremiah 48:10; Psalm 33:4), so they do not have nor lead the real Philadelphian work nor reach the “full number” of Gentiles as they should (Romans 11:25, NIV, NLT, BSB, CEV, GNT). As only the Philadelphians are promised to be protected from the hour of trial that will come on the whole world, the Laodiceans will not understand when Matthew 24:14 is fulfilled or when to flee per Matthew 24:15.
3. A widely held Laodicean view is the teaching that the Great Tribulation cannot begin until the King of the North invades the King of the South in Daniel 11:40. This view overlooks the fact that since the Great Tribulation includes the time of Jacob’s trouble (Jeremiah 30:7), it begins with the USA and its Anglo-Saxon allies like the UK getting invaded (cf. Daniel 11:39). Some of the groups cling to this sequential error, because it was once held by the late Herbert W. Armstrong, who changed his view by 1979 (The Time We Are In, Now. *Pastor General's Report-Vol. 1*, No. 15, November 20, 1979). Since the King of the North will eliminate those of the strongest fortresses (the USA, Canada, etc.) in Daniel 11:39, prior to invading the King of the South in Daniel 11:40, those who hold to this view will not know when the Great Tribulation will begin until after it has started.
4. Various Laodiceans believe that the final configuration of the Beast power in Revelation 17:12-13 MUST consist of exactly ten or eleven currently defined nations. This is faulty for many reasons, including the fact that the Greek terms for ‘nations’ is not in those passages and the passages are telling of a time of two future reorganizations. Reorganized kingdoms do not always stay within prior borders and that is likely to be the case in the future. While the European Union, which currently has 28 members and many potential members, may

well lose some member nations (like the United Kingdom which voted to leave), to insist that the final configuration must have ten or eleven nations is not consistent with the Bible. Additionally, the historical position of the Philadelphia portion of the COG (under Herbert Armstrong) taught in at least a dozen documents (*Plain Truth*, *Good News*, *Tomorrow's World*, booklets, *Co-worker letters*, *Bible Correspondence Course*) that the ten could consist of ten nations and/or groups of nations (as opposed to single nations). Unless the number reduces to that, those who insist on the Beast configuration having either ten or eleven nations will not possibly realize that the Great Tribulation has begun unless they repent of that view.

5. Several Laodicean groups clearly misunderstand Daniel 9:27, the second half of which ties in with Daniel 11:31 and Jesus' words in Matthew 24:15 (they tend to believe Daniel 9:27 was fulfilled by Christ). Those who misunderstand these passages will not have a proper pre-warning of what is happening nor likely know when the Great Tribulation will begin.
6. One or more groups also teach that the Great Tribulation can begin with the next year or so. As the Great Tribulation does not begin until approximately 3 ½ years after the 'peace deal' of Daniel 9:27 has been properly confirmed (and this has not happened yet), it is not possible for the Great Tribulation to begin prior to 2023. Since the deal is most likely to be confirmed in the Fall of the year (cf. Leviticus 23:24; 1 Corinthians 15:52), even 2023 would seem to be too soon.
7. Certain groups teach improper interpretations of the 1335, 1290, and 1260 days of Daniel 12 or have other problems with parts of that (most COG groups) that they will not understand when the Great Tribulation will start.
8. Most Laodicean groups fail to understand Habakkuk 2:2-8 and are not properly getting that warning out to the USA and UK. One group did teach it, but has backed off because of what appears to be internal politics and one of its rising leaders. The rising 'time bomb' of USA debt is something that needs to be pointed out and Habakkuk 2:2-8 points out the biblical threat that this poses. It should be proclaimed and we in CCOG are doing it. Many do not realize that Habakkuk 2:2-8 is

related to fleeing and the start of the Great Tribulation, and shows that debt is one of the reasons for the attack against the descendants of the tribes of Joseph.

9. Most Laodicean groups have various 'Elijah heresies.' Because of this, they will not be able to recognize the final Elijah. Some think he must have been Herbert Armstrong, despite the fact that he has been dead since January 16, 1986 and that death disqualifies him according to his writing about the final Elijah (*Mystery of the Ages*. 1985, p. 349). Some think that either there is no Elijah to come or that he is the church and not an individual, which goes against Jesus' teachings on the subject in Mark 9:12-13.
10. Many Laodicean groups do not understand the differing persecutions (and other matters) to come in Daniel 7:25, 11:30-39, Matthew 24:9-22, and Revelation 12:14-17. When the prophesied wave of persecution initially hits the Philadelphians primarily, (and not them), Laodiceans will not see this persecution as evidence that the Great Tribulation is about to begin. The old Radio Church of God (see Beware of False Brethren! *Good News*, January 1960) specifically applied the persecuting scriptures of Daniel 11:32-35 to the end time Philadelphian church as does the current CCOG.
11. A number of Laodicean groups do not teach that there is a physical place of safety to flee to (despite what Revelation 12:14-16 teaches). So, those holding that view will not be inclined to flee towards one just prior to the start of the Great Tribulation.
12. Most 'independent' Laodiceans do not believe that they need to 'gather together' prior to the time to flee despite what Zephaniah 2:1-3 teaches. Hence, it is not likely they will be inclined to flee together when a group they are not part of does just prior to the start of the Great Tribulation (cf. Revelation 12:14-17).
13. At least one Laodicean group erroneously believes that the abomination of desolation of Daniel 11:31 occurs after the King of the North invades the King of the South in Daniel 11:40. Since this will not happen that way, those who hold to that position will not understand when the Great Tribulation will begin (cf. Matthew 24:15,21).

14. Many Laodicean groups teach that the man of sin who sits in the temple of God (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4) is the Antichrist/False Prophet, not the Beast of the Sea. Yet, it is this Beast of the Sea, the final King of the North (Daniel 11:35-36). So, when this happens, those who hold to the wrong position will not understand its prophetic ramifications. The identity of the 'son of perdition' is important to understand in the end times.
15. A few Laodicean groups teach that a Jewish temple in Jerusalem will be rebuilt before Jesus returns. While this is remotely possible it is not required (the "temple of God" in the New Testament has to do with a Christian, not a modern Jewish, location). Since this will not happen as a few sometimes teach, those who hold to that position will not understand when the Great Tribulation will begin.
16. At least one Laodicean group teaches that the ten kings of Revelation 17:12 are to be in charge of ten regions around the world as opposed to being a primarily European power. Insistence upon this would mean that such a group could not possibly understand when the Great Tribulation would begin.
17. At least one Laodicean group teaches that the Beast of Revelation 13:1-10 is not a European. Since the Beast power will arise in Europe (cf. Daniel 9:26-27), those who do not understand this will not realize when the Great Tribulation is about to begin.
18. At least one or two of the larger Laodicean groups teach that the first verse in the Daniel 11 sequence relating to the beginning of the Great Tribulation is Daniel 11:40. Instead they should teach that it begins with Daniel 11:39, which is shortly after Daniel 11:31, which is also consistent with the start of the time of Jacob's trouble (Jeremiah 30:7). Those who hold to the Daniel 11:40 position will not understand when the Great Tribulation will begin.

And there are many more. Yet, it only takes the misunderstanding of one or more of the above points to not realize when the Great Tribulation will begin. Only the *Continuing* Church of God has been "rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15) on all of these matters.

The sad reality is that most Church of God groups, since they are not truly Philadelphian (despite whatever claims they might make), do not understand enough of the prophetic sequence and details in Daniel 11 or how they tie in with what Jesus taught in places such as Matthew 24. Because of this and other prophetic misunderstandings, those groups will not realize when they should flee per Jesus' instructions in Matthew 24:15-20 and hence will not go to be protected from the coming Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:21-22).

Lest this sound vain and boastful on our part, let me state that long-time high level Church of God leaders in other groups have specifically told me (Bob Thiel) on each of those points that what we in the *Continuing* Church of God teach on these points, including those that differ even from what their own groups teach, is correct. But for 'organizational' (and not truly biblical) reasons, their groups do not publicly teach them.

Jesus warned "there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matthew 24:21). And Jesus promised the Philadelphian Christians protection from it (Revelation 3:7-10). Other Christians did not receive that same promise in Revelation.

Those who rely too much on a compromised ministry (Ezekiel 34:7-10) to teach them prophecy that is not truly in accordance with scripture need to realize that according to Jesus' words in chapters 2 & 3 in Revelation and 21 in Luke, only relatively few Christians will be protected from the hour of trial that will come upon the whole world (cf. Revelation 12:14-17). Those who will not listen to the truly faithful in the ministry will also share that fate (cf. Ephesians 4:11-16).

We in the *Continuing* Church of God truly:

"have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts" (2 Peter 1:19, KJV).

It should also be emphasized that the Bible also warns independents who think that they do not need to be part of the end time Philadelphian remnant of the Church of God also will not be protected (cf. Zephaniah 2:1-3). The New Testament is clear that Christians really should be part of a church (Ephesians 4:11-16; cf. 1 Corinthians 4:17; 10:32-33)—especially as we get closer to the end (Hebrews 10:24-25; cf. Zephaniah 2:1-3).

Unless the Laodicean groups and/or individuals repent as Jesus urges them to in Revelation 3:19, they will not possibly know when the Great Tribulation will begin (Matthew 24:21) nor know to flee prior to that start (Matthew 24:15-20).

COG groups that rely on misplaced tradition (whether recent or older) above the Bible for many aspects of their prophetic views are going to learn too late that they do not have the “sure word of prophecy” (2 Peter 1:19, KJV).

Jesus told the Laodiceans that they needed to change in many areas (Revelation 3:17-19), but He also taught that since they did not think they needed to, that they would suffer because of that (Revelation 3:14-16).

There are also more prophetic and other differences that other COG groups have from the Bible that this booklet has not gone into. The reality is that without the right emphasis on the final phase of the work, holding the Bible in sufficiently high regard, practicing Philadelphian love, truly teaching all that Jesus taught, and ignoring one anointed for a double-portion of God’s Spirit (reminiscent of Elisha, 2 Kings 2:9-13) as the CCOG’s top human leader was, the COG groups that ignore prophetic warnings are doing so to their peril.

While some discount the importance of prophecy, notice what the Apostle Paul taught:

¹¹ And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.

¹² The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. ¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts. (Romans 13:11-14)

Are we not a lot closer to the end now than when Paul wrote that? Paul also taught that true Christians were not to be like others who would not know approximately when Jesus would return (1 Thessalonians 5:4).

The Apostle Peter wrote:

¹¹ Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹² looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the

heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? ¹³ Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. (2 Peter 3:11-13)

Properly paying attention to prophetic events not only helps one to be ready for Jesus (Luke 21:36;), but is also intended to be a reflective exercise to get Christians to examine their lives enough to change as they should (cf. Romans 13:11-14; 2 Peter 3:10-13). Should you not be watching world events as properly explained in the light of Bible prophecy (cf. Mark 9:13-36; Revelation 19:10)?

The various Laodicean groups do not properly understand end time prophecy, and that will contribute to their members NOT fleeing when they should (cf. Matthew 24:15-21; Revelation 12:14-17).

The Laodiceans have wrong ideas about the Great Tribulation, are not promised protection from it, and will (along with those of Sardis, and apparently some of Thyatira per Revelation 2:22) have to go into the Great Tribulation and be subject to death and persecution (Daniel 7:25b; Revelation 12:17).

Do not be misled by those who do not truly understand key end-time biblical prophecies.

The Bible teaches that you are not to let family, traditions, societal pressures, or so-called intellectuals stop you from truly following Jesus (Matthew 10:37, 15:9; John 4:23-24; 1 Corinthians 1:26-29; 1 Timothy 6:20).

While many seem to believe that the *Continuing* Church of God is like the scores of claimed COG groups, the prophetic reality is that we are unique.

We do possess the Philadelphia mantle (Revelation 3:7-13; 2 Kings 2:13) and truly stand for the truth (1 Timothy 3:15). We are not just one of scores of Church of God groups. We are different and are leading the final phase of the work (which must be done in truth per Psalm 33:4) while working towards the fulfillment of Matthew 24:14.

5. Summary of Proofs, Clues, and Signs to Identifying the True Church

Again, here is a list of 18 proofs, signs, and clues which demonstrate that the true Christian church must be the true Church of God.

1. Puts the word of God above traditions of men and hence has not added doctrines that are opposed to the Bible (cf. Matthew 15:3-9).
2. Uses the biblical name "Church of God" (e.g. Acts 20:28).
3. Contends earnestly for the original faith (Jude 3), even under threats of persecution (e.g. Acts 5:27-32).
4. Traces its biblical doctrines throughout history (cf. 1 John 2:6).
5. Keeps Passover on the 14th of Nisan (Leviticus 23:5; Matthew 26:18).
6. Has known which books were part of the Bible since the time of the Apostle John (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Revelation 1:9-19; 22:18-19).
7. Teaches the truth about the Godhead (Romans 1:20; Colossians 2:9).
8. Teaches and keeps the loving laws of God (1 John 2:4).
9. Opposes participation in carnal warfare in this world (John 18:36; Luke 3:14).
10. Has been the persecuted, but not the persecutor (John 15:20-21).
11. Has not adopted the outward trappings of paganism in terms of ecclesiastical dress or buildings (cf. Deuteronomy 12:29-30).
12. Preaches the full gospel (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20), including striving for Gentile converts (cf. Romans 11:25).
13. Is a "little flock" (Luke 12:32; Romans 11:15; cf. Revelation 14:1-9).
14. Traces its physical location through multiple lead cities (Hebrews 13:14) and the seven churches of Revelation 2 & 3.
15. Has the sign of the biblical Sabbath (Exodus 31:13; Hebrews 4:9).
16. Understands God's plan of salvation through Jesus Christ as pictured through the Holy Days (1 Corinthians 5:7-8; James 1:18)
17. Teaches against the observation of pagan holidays (1 Corinthians 10:20-22).
18. Will not align with end-time ecumenical Babylon (Revelation 13:4-10; 18:4).

Only a Church of God group can meet all those criteria. The true Christian church believes the Bible, believes God, understands God's nature and plan, and does the work of God. This cannot truly be said for the Greco-Roman churches and off-shoots.

Which Church of God?

The Church of God, containing human beings under the true authority of Jesus Christ, is not perfect (cf. James 3:1-2; 1 John 1:8). There were problems in the New Testament church (see also chapter 3) as well as in all eras of the Church of God (Revelation 2-3).

Scripture is clear that there would be various Church of God and non-Church of God groups professing Christ at the time of the end.

According to Jesus, in the time of the end there would be Churches of God who display differing characteristics. Jesus has criticisms and condemnations for those who are Thyatiran (Revelation 2:18-29), Sardisian (Revelation 3:1-6), as well as the various Laodiceans (Revelation 3:14-22). Hence, groups in those categories would not seem to be ideal for any who truly wish to be part of the most faithful Christian church.

In the time of the end, the only Church of God that Jesus commends and does not condemn is the one with “a little strength,” the Church in Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7-13). These are those who are not so offended by others that they will allow hurt feelings to cost them their crown (Revelation 3:11), but instead they will support God’s work.

Thus, those who wish to be part of the most faithful remnant of Philadelphia would want to be with a Church of God group that:

1. Makes proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom as a witness its top priority (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20) and goes through the open doors (Revelation 3:7-8; Acts 14:27; Colossians 4:2-4).
2. Supports poor brethren (Romans 12:13; Galatians 2:10; James 2:14-17; Hebrews 13:16; Isaiah 58:7), including widows and orphans (James 1:27), particularly in places like Africa and Asia.
3. Truly practices biblical governance (1 Corinthians 12:28), including Matthew 18:15-17.
4. Has the proclamation, doctrinal, prophetic, and loving fruits Jesus spoke of (John 7:16-20; 13:35; Luke 4:18; 14:13; Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20; Revelation 3:7-13).
5. Warns those who think that they are in the Church to not fall away (1 Timothy 4:1).

6. Has spiritual gifts, including receiving prophetic dreams, in the last days (Acts 2:17-18).
7. Understands the historical and current roles of the churches of Revelation 2 & 3.
8. Explains and understands biblical prophecy well enough (e.g. Daniel 11:29-45; Matthew 24) to know when to flee (Matthew 24:15-20; Revelation 3:10, 12:14-16) prior to the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:21).
9. Understands and teaches that God made what He did so that eternity would be better (cf. Genesis 1:31; Isaiah 9:7; Romans 8:20). That Jesus came to make eternity better (cf. John 3:16-17; Hebrews 8:6). And that our individual part is to give love in a unique way to help eternity be better (cf. Matthew 22:37-39; Romans 8:28; 1 Corinthians 12:4-12; Galatians 6:10; Ephesians 2:10; Job 14:14-15).

The one group that best represents the remnant of the Philadelphia portion of the Church of God (Revelation 3:7-13) in the 21st century is the *Continuing Church of God*.

The *Continuing Church of God* is the only organized church that we are aware of who officially does *all* the above. The compelling reason to want to be part of us is not that we are perfect, but that we do teach in accordance with the Bible and the beliefs and practices of Jesus' early followers. Most churches have some truth, but none other appears to be the "pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). Satan, the god of this age (2 Corinthians 4:4), appears, not as the devil, but as an angel of light to many (2 Corinthians 11:13-14). Jesus said many would come in His name, proclaiming that He was the Christ — and yet, without realizing it, deceiving the whole world (Matthew 24:4-5).

We are not just one of scores of Church of God groups, but we are the only international Philadelphian organization. We are also the leader of the Philadelphian remnant that God is using to go through doors He opens (Revelation 3:7-8) for the fulfillment of Matthew 24:14, Romans 11:25, etc. in the final phase of the work.

In the 20th century, the old Radio Church of God grew at an annualized rate of 30% per year for decades. Not only has the *Continuing Church of God* exceeded that, it has been the fastest growing xWCG COG in the 21st century!

So, now that you know the proofs, clues, fruits, and signs, are you going to be like the Bereans of old who “received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed” (Acts 17:11-12)?

Notice what the Bible says:

²¹... receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

²² But **be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.** ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴ for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. ²⁵ But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. (James 1:21-25)

Will you do what biblically you realize you should do and support the *Continuing* Church of God or be a hearer only, deceiving yourself?

Can you believe the work that God is doing (Acts 13:41)?

Do you not wish to support the *Continuing* Church of God as we continue to preach the gospel of the kingdom to the world as a witness (Matthew 24:14) as well as teach all Jesus commanded (Matthew 28:19-20)?

Are you ready to be really part of the true, and most faithful, Christian church?

Continuing Church of God

The USA office of the *Continuing Church of God* is located at: 1036 W. Grand Avenue, Grover Beach, California, 93433 USA. We have supporters all around the world, and in all inhabited continents (all continents, except Antarctica).

Continuing Church of God Website Information

CCOG.ORG The main website for the *Continuing Church of God*.

CCOG.ASIA Asian-focused website, with multiple Asian languages.

CCOG.IN India-focused website, with some Indian languages.

CCOG.EU European-focused website, with multiple European languages.

CCOG.NZ Website targeted towards New Zealand.

CCOGAFRICA.ORG Website targeted towards Africa.

CCOGCANADA.CA Website targeted towards Canada.

CDLIDD.ES This is a totally Spanish language website.

PNIND.PH Philippines-focused website, with some Tagalog.

Radio & YouTube Video Channels

BIBLENEWSPROPHECY.NET Bible News Prophecy online radio.

Bible News Prophecy channel. YouTube sermonettes.

CCOGAfrica channel. YouTube video messages from Africa.

CCOG Animations Animated messages on YouTube.

CDLIDDsermones channel. YouTube messages in Spanish.

ContinuingCOG channel. YouTube video sermons.

News and History Websites

CHURCHHISTORYBOOK.COM Church history website.

COGWRITER.COM News, history, and prophecy website.

(Back Cover)

There are Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Protestants, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Church of God Christians, and others who believe that they are, or at least part of, the true Christian church.

There are thousands of groups and fellowships that claim some connection to Christianity. In the 21st century, which group is the most faithful?

The Bible, along with certain facts about church history and church fruits (Matthew 7:16-20) contains proofs, clues, and signs to help answer this. This book links scriptures with facts of history to provide helpful information about this.

The second and third chapters of the Book of Revelation contain messages from Jesus Christ for seven churches. Many believe that these churches represent the church throughout the entire church age (from the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 until the return of Jesus Christ).



Remnants of Ancient Philadelphia

In the 21st century, the most faithful according to Jesus' words would be the remnant of the Philadelphia portion of the Church of God (Revelation 3:7-13).

Who represents the most faithful remnant of the Philadelphia portion of the true Christian church?

If you are willing to be like the Bereans of old (Acts 17:10-12), you can find out if you have a God-inspired love of the truth and truly believe the Bible. If you are willing to be a doer, and not just a hearer of the word, you perhaps can become a blessed part of the Philadelphia faithful (James 1:22-25; Revelation 3:7-13).