

(19b) WHY SO MANY DENOMINATIONS: The Search for Truth

There are about 41,000 Christian denominations today! How do you find the truth among so many? Why are there so many denominations? Does God have a church today? Does it really matter? Don't all roads lead to heaven? Isn't it just different courses for different horses?

The Bible says there is one church: "One body (Church)...one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Ephesians 4:4,5). God's desire is one united Church (John 17:21; 1 Corinthians 12:25). But it also predicted a departure from truth (Acts 20:30). Christian teachers would arise and distort the truth. When Constantine became the first Christian Emperor in 313 AD, it resulted in a Church-State union. As a result, Rome became Christian, but Christianity became pagan. Most Biblical teachings were altered or dropped through pagan influence: Sunday replaced Sabbath; the doctrine of the Immortal soul appeared; Baptism by sprinkling came into the church. Only a few teachings remained intact, such as the divinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which was taught by Jesus (Matthew 28:19). This means the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are the one triune God. That's what I like about my friends in the Church of Rome. They still hold that teaching.

Then came the year 538AD. The Bishop of Rome was made "The head of the church and the true and effectual corrector of heretics" by the Emperor Justinian. Sadly church traditions were placed above the Bible, and this led to the Dark Ages. Over the next twelve hundred years calls were made for reformation of the Dark Age church. Faithful bishops, priests, nuns and lay people wanted the church to get back to the Bible and its teachings. Tragically they were persecuted. Often the Bible was banned and locked up in languages such as Latin to keep the people in ignorance of its truths. The Bible says of this time: "...The dragon...persecuted the woman, who brought forth the man child. And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and sixty days" (Revelation 12:13,6). The 1260 days, according to the Biblical prophetic principle of 1 day = 1 year, represent 1260 years. The light of truth went out in Dark Age Europe.

But a godly priest, Martin Luther, at the Wittenberg University in Germany lit a match. Luther re-discovered the truth of the centrality of the Bible to guide God's people (2 Timothy 3:16; Matthew 4:4). He discovered we are saved by grace alone through faith in Jesus (Ephesians 2:8,9). Thus the Lutheran church began with its emphases on: the Bible alone and Grace alone. That's what I like about my Lutheran friends.

But there was more light yet to be restored to God's church (Proverbs 4:18). So God raised up John Calvin, a French refugee who fled from religious persecution in France to Switzerland. He taught the sovereignty of God and the security and assurance of salvation that is found by faith in Christ (1 John 5:11-13). Thus the Reformed and Presbyterian Churches began, with the teachings of the sovereignty of God, and the security and assurance of Salvation in Christ. That's what I like about my Calvinist and Presbyterian friends.

But God had still more light for His Church. Sadly the new denominations that were raised up did not go further than their founding fathers, so God raised up other instruments to restore truth to the church. John Smyth left the Anglican Church and England for Holland in 1607. Smyth baptized people by immersion, according to the Bible, and his followers set up the first Baptist Church in 1612 (Colossians 2:12). Thus the Baptist Church began, teaching believer's baptism by immersion. And that's what I like about my Baptist friends.

As time went on, the Anglican Church became formal as people advanced no further than their leaders. So God raised up John Wesley to bring back truth to His church. Wesley heard the amazing grace and salvation of God one night at a meeting in Aldersgate Street in London. Peace flooded his mind at the knowledge of the forgiveness of all his sins. He began to preach Jesus to anyone and everyone, to lead them to Him. The discovery that he brought to the attention of the world was, "Living like Christ" - His life in us (Galatians 2:20). So the Methodist Church was born, emphasizing "living like Christ" - His life in us. That's what I like about my Methodist friends.

Thus over time as each new group built on the re-discoveries of the previous group, truth was slowly being restored. The Church of Rome went into the Dark Age tunnel in 538AD, but 1260 years later, by 1798, many denominations had appeared. Each group had some Bible truth, but none had all of it. Then in 1798 the Pope was imprisoned. As scholars, priests, ministers and lay people of all denominations (Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Congregational, Baptist etc) saw that the 1260 years met its fulfilment with the imprisonment of the Pope, they then began serious study of Daniel 8:14, the sealed portion of Daniel: "Unto 2300 days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed" (Daniel 8:14). All of them believed something was to happen in 1843/1844. Some didn't know what would happen, but many felt they knew. William Miller, a Baptist, began an interdenominational movement of some 500,000 people, made up of Baptists, Methodists, Congregationalists, Anglicans and others, who

believed and taught that Jesus would return on October 22, 1844. But when Jesus didn't return on that date they were shattered. This is known as the Great Disappointment.

A diverse group of these disappointed people began to study together, seeking the answer to the question that filled their minds at this time: "Why didn't Jesus come?" They knew the date, 1844, was correct, because part of the 2300 day prophecy was the 70 weeks or 490 years of Daniel 9, which as we have seen in a previous program, was an exact fulfillment: Jesus was baptised in 27 AD and was crucified in 31AD exactly as the prophecy of Daniel 9 had predicted. Since the date was correct, they wondered, "what went wrong?"

William Miller had taught that the sanctuary was the Earth, which was to be cleansed with fire at Christ's return. But as they studied the Bible these people discovered there was a temple in heaven, and that the cleansing of heaven's temple was to take place during a judgment that begins before Jesus returns. By comparing Daniel 7 & 8 it is clearly seen that the opening of the judgment in heaven in Daniel 7:9,10 is the same as the cleansing of the sanctuary in Daniel 8:14. They saw that judgment began in 1844 and that we are to be judged by the Ten Commandments (James 2:10-12). Thus they began to keep the neglected seventh day, Saturday Sabbath.

In Revelation 10 they also discovered their mission: "And he said to me, you must prophesy again to many peoples and nations and tongues and kings" (Revelation 10:11). Thus they began to proclaim the global messages of the 3 angels (Revelation 14:6-12): Firstly - "The hour of God's judgment has come"- since 1844 we have been living during God's judgment that is taking place in heaven; Secondly: "Babylon has fallen..." and the accompanying message of Revelation 18:1-4 - "Come out of her my people"; Thirdly, "Don't receive the mark of the beast". Beside the Sabbath, and the visible second coming of Jesus, this interdenominational group found other lost Bible truths, such as death as a sleep. Thus in the 1860's the Seventh-day Adventist church emerged.

So which denomination, which church? Remember Jesus said He would have "...one flock and one shepherd" (John 10:14,15). Remember, Paul said, "one body (one Church)...one faith (one set of beliefs), one baptism..." (Ephesians 4:4-6). The dragon went to make war with the remnant of the woman's seed (Revelation 12:17). Her seed in chapter 12 is Jesus. Since her seed is Jesus, then the remnant is the remnant of Jesus, the remnant of His body, or His church. Thus, God does have an end-time remnant church. But which church?

Revelation gives 6 identifying characteristics of God's end-time remnant Church: 1. It keeps God's commandments, which includes the 7th day, Saturday Sabbath (Revelation 12:17); 2. It has the faith of Jesus (Revelation 14:12). This means they have faith in Jesus alone for forgiveness, salvation, a new life of powerful loving living with victory over Satan and sin

in this life (Revelation 12:11). But "the faith of Jesus" also means the teachings or doctrines of Jesus (Jude 3; 1 Timothy 4:1). Jesus believed and taught: baptism by immersion, death as a sleep until the resurrection at His visible return for His friends; hell fire at the end of the world; the 7th day Sabbath; 3. They proclaim the 3 angel's messages of Revelation (Revelation 10:11; 14:6-12); 4. It is a global movement (Revelation 10:11; 14:6); 5. It emerges after 1798 or the end of the 1260 day/years (Revelation 12:6,17); 6. It has the testimony of Jesus or the Spirit's gift of prophecy (Revelation 12:17; 19:10).

God has an end-time remnant church and has given these identifying features so we can find it and be a part of it and its mission to prepare people for the soon return of Jesus. So which denomination, which church – what one body fulfils all these criteria? I humbly submit to you that only the Seventh-day Adventist church fulfils all these criteria. However let me hasten to add that God has his children in other folds at this time, and that while the Seventh-day Adventist church is the remnant church of Bible prophecy, not all of its members are his end-time remnant people, because it is a matter of the heart – loving God and His children unreservedly. The Seventh-day Adventist church does have the faith or beliefs of Jesus: The Bible as the only rule of faith and practice; Salvation by faith in Jesus alone; The 7th Day Saturday Sabbath; Christ's visible return; Death as a sleep until Christ's return; Caring for our body, the temple of God, by following Biblical principles of health; Proclamation of the messages of the 3 angels. While not the largest church, it does go globally with God's 3 angels messages of Revelation 14 in practically every country of the world today.

The Seventh-day Adventist remnant church of Bible prophecy began as people from various churches became one as they "came out" of churches not following all of the Ten Commandments and Christ's teachings. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me...**Other sheep I have** that are not of this fold, them also **I must bring**. They too will listen to my voice, and there will be **one flock** and one shepherd" (John 10:14-16). We must listen and respond to the Good Shepherd who says – "Babylon has fallen - it can't be repaired - Come out of her my people" (Revelation 18:4). There are only two groups on earth in the end: those in Babylon and the Remnant who come out of Babylon. My friend, this world is about to experience the worst crisis in history – earth's final crisis. Jesus wants to take you through it safely. But he can only do that if you are part of His end-time remnant. Why not tell God right now that you will "come out" in obedience to his call, and become part of His end-time remnant church?