

## The Wednesday Word, April 22, 2009: The Gospel and The True Church

"Father Abraham, who do you have in heaven? Any Episcopalians up there?"

"No. No Episcopalians."

"Do you have any Presbyterians up there?"

"No Presbyterians."

"Do you have any Independents or any Seceders?"

"No, we do not have any of those."

"Have any Methodists up there?"

"No, no, no."

"Well, who do you have up there then?"

"We do not know those names up here. All who are here are Christians, believers in Christ, men and women who have been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb."

"Oh, is that so? Is that the case? Then God help us. God help us to forget all party names and to be Christians in deed and truth."

George Whitfield

I've often been asked, "Which is the True Church?" That's a great question! After all, in America alone there are, according to the Encyclopedia of American Religions, over 15,000 denominations, sects and groups.

I remember growing up in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and being fully persuaded that God was, 'one like unto us', a good Presbyterian. Then one day I met some folk who were equally certain that the Almighty was a Methodist. Afterwards, the Elim Pentecostals came along with an implied conviction that God was one of their number, following which some Roman Catholics friends declared God to be, without doubt, one of them since He had, they claimed, founded their Church.

So back to the question, which is the "True Church?" Before we answer this, it's important to recognize the question lurking behind that question. What so often is really being asked is, "To which Church do I need to belong in order to be right with God?" Perhaps you have sometimes thought, "If God has a True Church out there then I need to belong to it."

Knowing these concerns regarding membership of the "True Church" the cults massage this idea for all it's worth. Each cult claims to be the "True Church" and that everyone else is wrong. They claim that God has raised them up and it is, therefore, incumbent upon us all to join their number and believe as they do.

Of course, we must face the claims of any group designating themselves as, the 'True Church' with the simple question, "Are they correct?" If they are correct and they are the 'True Church' then we all should join them. After all, if God has set them on earth as His 'True Church' then we really have no business being separated from them. If, on the other hand, they are not the 'True Church' as they claim, we must equally recognize that they are the offspring of hell, spawned by the Devil, the Father of Lies, and that we have no business being associated with them in any manner. It matters not if the Church in question traces its origin to antiquity or is of the 'Johnny Come Lately'

variety, if they falsely claim themselves to be the ‘True Church’ outside of which there is no salvation then let them be accursed (Galatians 1:6-8).

But how do we know whether or not those who claim to be the ‘True Church’ are mistaken? It’s really quite simple. We must measure what they say by the gospel. They claim that salvation is in their community, but the Bible claims that salvation is in Christ alone (Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved Acts 4:12). But they ignore this scripture and counter that Christ founded their Church and the way to get to Christ is by being in their number. They are the ones, they say, who have been entrusted to impart grace to their members. But this is utter nonsense! There is only one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5). We, therefore, need no Church to mediate between God and ourselves!

The gospel exposes the error of any group masquerading as the ‘True Church’ for the gospel tells us that redemption is in Christ Jesus and not in any Church. Ephesians 1:7 is clear on this point saying,

“In whom (Christ, not the Church) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.”

The cry of the New Testament is to, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, (not The Church,) and you will be saved (Acts 16:31).

We are to entrust our souls to Christ, not to the Church. Never ever do the Apostles direct people to put their confidence in any Church. No Church was nailed to the cross, Christ was.

Jesus Christ is always the object of true faith. He, not any church, is the rock on which we rest with full confidence. We are to look “unto Jesus (not the church) the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). Jesus said, “Come unto ME (not the church) and I (not the church) will give you rest.” (Matt 11:28)

But where is the True Church and where do we find it? The True Church is in Jesus Christ alone! All who have trusted Him and His substitutionary work on their behalf are already in that True Church. Adolph Saphir makes a wise observation saying;

“We ask Christ, “Where is the Church?” he says, “The Church is where I, the Crucified One, am trusted and loved.” We ask Christ, “What is the Church?” Christ says, “My body.” “Why do you persecute Me?” He said to Paul, and Paul never forgot that word and all his doctrine of the Church developed out of that saying. Again, if you ask the Church, “What is the Church?” the Church begins to speak of Christ and points to Him. She says, “We are in Christ. We desire not to be found in ourselves, having our own righteousness, but to be found in Him. He is all in all.”

Adolph Saphir: Christ Crucified:  
Lecture 3, The Believers View of  
the Cross.

Since we already are members of the True Church, by faith in Christ alone, we don’t have to join

somebody's notion of the same to get right with God. We already are "in Christ". In Him we are members of the one True Church, therefore, to trust in membership of some earthly organization, no matter how ancient, is to desert and abandon the gospel.

The 'True Church' doctrine and the gospel are diametrically opposed to each other. They both offer the same thing ---acceptance with God. So which position is correct? They both can't be true. Either acceptance with God is found in Christ alone or by belonging to the 'True Church'--- -Either/or.... take your pick! If a church can make you accepted with God then you don't need Christ crucified.

The 'True Church', regardless of the name on the front door, claims to alone have got it right. One of the many evils of this doctrine is that it tends to give birth to religious tyranny (the worst of all the tyrannies). When any Church represents itself as having power over the eternal destiny of its adherents, then it can rule its people with an iron fist. When the members view themselves as being in the 'True Church', then they will find it difficult to ever disassociate no matter how distasteful they find that church. In their minds, if they leave the 'True Church' they are facing hell fire. They are living under bondage and tyranny and are thus far removed from the freedom of the gospel!

Finally, another problem with the "True Church" teaching is that it breeds elitism. After all, they think they are God's special people on the earth, because they are His 'True Church'. They are, they think, the only ones who have it right, therefore, they assume that God must look upon them with special favor. This kind of thinking, then, finds itself in direct competition with the gospel for the gospel confers special status on everyone who by faith accepts Jesus Christ as substitute and savior. In the gospel, special status is conferred on us in Christ alone plus nothing.

The gospel, when properly applied and understood, is a threat to the 'True Church' teaching. If people begin to grasp the application of the gospel then there is no further need for the 'True Church': it becomes redundant. No longer will the 'Church' be needed to get one right with God. That means that if people find out that the way to God is in a perfect Person, not in any church, the membership of the so-called 'True Church' will drop. And if attendance dropped so would the Church income. That's all too risky a prospect! And that is why any group claiming to be the 'True Church' will never preach and apply the gospel and that is also why any church which preaches, expounds and applies the gospel can never fall for the error of the 'True Church' doctrine.

And that's the Gospel Truth!