

Consider a picture of your family. Family is a wonderful thing! The same things I enjoy with my family now I hope to do throughout eternity as part of God's family.

In this study we will look at some of the pictures God gives us in the Bible of His family, what He calls His church. The pictures He gives us are beautiful. They show us how beautiful a true family can be, and help us to fix our hearts on being part of his eternal family that we learned about in the last study.

In the New Testament we find pictures of his family the church. A redeemed community, called out of brokenness into wholeness; out of slavery to sin and into freedom and right living; out of confusion and into understanding; out of meaningless living and into an eternal purpose; from living shallow self-centred lives; to living rich and meaningful lives to the glory of God.

The Bible tells us that the ultimate purpose of life itself is to know God and Jesus Christ whom he sent to us. In fact when Jesus was praying in the garden of Gethsemane, the night before his death, this is what he said:

John 17:3 *Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*

God calls His church to one day spend eternity with Him, and in the mean time to work with Him to reach as many people with the invitation to join His family as possible.

To invite them to know God too,
 To learn to love people as God loves people,
 To join in sharing the great invitation to join the Father's family,
 To grow in grace as the Holy Spirit reveals the character of God in them,
 And to take up their role as a servant both in the church and to those around them.

The church is founded on word of God, it is surrendered to Jesus Christ and empowered by Holy Spirit. Accordingly it has the authority to wage war against the enemy of God, even Satan himself, and prevail against him.

Jesus said in Matthew 16:18 *"I will build my church."* It is God's chosen method for reaching the world, and as such it is the object of His supreme regard. It's a beautiful picture – of a loving Father and His family.

But I hear you say, if God's church is His family, why are there so many churches – and how do I know which one is teaching the truth?

Clearly it has to be pretty simple. You see God's hasn't changed. His Word hasn't changed – in fact it's not about to:

Matthew 24:35 ³⁵*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."*

Perhaps a better question to add to this is what kind of worshippers is the Father seeking?

John 4:23-24 *"yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is Spirit and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth."*

The Father is seeking those who worship him in Spirit and in Truth. In other words those who genuinely seek to worship Him the way He has shown and asked us to in His word. When seeking a church to belong, search for a church that teaches His Word - the Bible. Search for a church that really desires to know the Father, and is genuinely making the Father known to the community that surrounds it. Search for a church that truly values genuine transformation even above their own reputation, a people who are transformed by God's word of truth.

As Jesus prayed in John 17;14-17

¹⁴I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. ¹⁵My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

Well you might be asking, “If that’s what a church should be about, then why are there so many different churches?” Here in New Zealand there are so many denominations represented at the moment – why is that? If all denominations profess to follow the truth of the Bible, then why are there so many of them? How do I know which one is teaching the truth?

What we find in the Bible and in history since the Bible was written, is that regardless of what was happening in the world at the time, God has always had his people that have followed Him. People that have remained true to what they knew to be His word to them, despite what anyone else thought of them.

GOD’S LAST DAY PEOPLE

As we look at Revelation we see that God will have a people in the last days as well, a church who remain completely faithful to His Word. But we might ask “why has God always had a remnant?” Let’s see what the Bible says about them:

Revelation 14:12

*¹²This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who **obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.***

Revelation 12:17

*¹⁷Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring—those who obey God’s commandments and **hold to the testimony of Jesus.***

Revelation 19:10

“Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of Prophecy.”

The Remnant

- Hold the Testimony of Jesus = Spirit of Prophecy
- They obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus

What’s the Spirit of Prophecy? Let me ask you a logical question: If we were looking for a type of person in the Bible who had the spirit of prophecy, who would that be? The prophets! And what did the prophets do? They warned of the coming judgments of God, and called people to turn to God. They had a message from God, and they were called to faithfully deliver it. Why? So that people could respond to God’s invitation and be saved from what was otherwise coming to them.

Noah warned the people of his day that God’s judgment was coming in a flood and called them to enter the ark and be saved.

Elijah warned the people of his day and called people to make straight the way of the Lord.

Jonah warned the wicked city of Ninevah that judgment was coming and called them to respond to God – and they did!

Just as John the Baptist warned the people of his day and called them to repentance before Christ’s first coming.

So God’s people in the last days warn that time is running out - Christ is coming soon, and they call people to be ready for the Second Coming of Christ.

In Revelation 14 we see that this same spirit of prophecy is behind the 3 angels’ message that goes out to the whole world just prior to the return of Christ – this is the message of God’s last day people to the world.

GOD’S LAST DAY MESSAGE

Let’s see what the Bible has to say about the message they are called to proclaim:

Revelation 14:6 *⁶Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he **had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people.** He said in a*

loud voice, 'Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come. Worship Him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.

(Can you recognize the spirit of prophecy right there?) A message of warning and of invitation?

A second angel followed and said 'Fallen, Fallen is Babylon the great, which made all the nations drink of the maddening wine of her adulteries.'

A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives the mark on the forehead or on the hand, he too will drink the wine of the wrath of God's fury, which has been poured out full strength into the cup of His wrath."

The Remnant message

- Had the eternal gospel
- To every nation, tribe, language and people
- Message: Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come.
- They cry out against worshipping the beast or its image, and call people to worship Him who made the heavens the sea and the springs of water.

If you think about these characteristics, you'll see that God's remnant in the last days have the same characteristics as God's people have had right through the ages. And it makes perfect sense! God's remnant in the last days resembles His people through the ages. This is because they have the same foundation; they are built on the same rock, Jesus Christ. And God never changes.

Illustration: Let's say my wife makes herself a summer dress from yellow material with small blue polka-dots, using material that she bought from Spotlight. But then the weather starts to cool off she decides she wants to modify the dress but needs more of the same material. So she sends me off to spotlight with the dress. I ask the lady at the counter for more of the same material. She looks for me but cant find what I'm looking for. So I say to her "don't you have anything out the back that resembles this material?" She takes me to the rear of the shop where there is a bargain bin. All the ends of the rolls are there, and as we start looking through the bargain bin sure enough there it is. How do I recognize it? The yellow was a good sign, but when I see the small blue polka dots, it's a dead giveaway! The remnant resembles the original!

And it should come as no surprise that God's people in the last days have the same characteristics as God's people have had right through the ages. And doesn't that make perfect sense? Unless God has changed, His Remnant, by definition will resemble His true people throughout the ages right? Absolutely! Has God changed? Not at all, in fact Hebrews 13:8 says:

⁸Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

We learned in our last lesson that just as God has had His true followers throughout history, (also described as the offspring or the seed of the woman), so the devil has had his. These two seeds which originate with Christ and with Lucifer way back in the beginning of the great conflict, can be traced throughout time from before the garden of Eden, right down to our present day and into the future when God will finally put an end to the Devil and his seed in the Lake of Fire.

We see these two seeds in the garden of Eden, between the woman and her offspring and the serpent and his offspring. We see these two seeds in the lives of Cain and Abel. Abel worshipped God the way God had asked, but Cain substituted his own method of worship. Of course God accepted Able's offering and rejected Cain's offering. Cain in his jealousy was so incensed with this that he took to his brother and murdered him.

We come down to the days of Noah. The Bible tells us that the world had become so wicked at that time that God had decided that He was going to destroy the world by flood and start again. So God sends both a warning and an invitation through His remnant at that time (a man named Noah) to everyone living on the earth to enter the great ark. But as you know it was a message that was scorned and ridiculed and as a result only 8 people entered it and were saved, Noah, his wife, their three sons and their wives.

But even as these 8 true followers start a new life, it's not long before their successive generations turn away from God and once again the earth is filled with rebellion against him.

You remember the account of how the people tried to build a great tower to exalt themselves instead of God, and how God confused the languages of the people so that the tower could not be completed. As a result the place was named Babel/ or Babylon, meaning "confusion" because God had caused confusion to come.

Well the people spread out across the earth, and God decided He would raise up a people who would be faithful to Him, a people through whom He could bring news of His love to the rest of the world. We find that God makes a covenant with Abraham that he would make his descendents like the sands of the sea, and that they the children of Israel.

1 Corinthians 10:1-4 tells us the foundation they were originally built upon

¹For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. ²They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. (There's the biggest baptism recorded in the Bible) ³They all ate the same spiritual food ⁴and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.

Here we see that even the Jewish nation was originally founded upon the commandments of God, and on the faith of Jesus.

And as we throw our minds back over how God led them we marvel at how blessed they were. There in the wilderness He led them with the cloud of protection by day and a pillar of fire by night. He fed them with manna – bread falling from the sky! He kept their sandals from wearing out in the desert as He restored them to the land He had promised them. How wonderfully God blessed the church of Israel!

It was not only founded on the commandments. It was also founded upon the faith of Jesus. But the trouble was this church that was once established as the chosen people of God, when Jesus came into this earth, what did that church finally do to Christ? You see they had fallen so far from the truth as God had revealed it to them that when Jesus Himself came to earth he had **restore** to them a knowledge of God, to teach them of His love for people, and restore a **true understanding** of the commandments. Listen to what he said:

Matthew 5:17

¹⁷"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

And yet what did this church do to Jesus? They rejected him and put him to death on the cross, and ultimately they lost their place as God's chosen people. Listen to Jesus in Matthew 23:37-38:

Matthew 23:37-38

³⁷"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. ³⁸Look, your house is left to you desolate.

God had wanted to bring them back to Himself – to accept His invitation to come to faithfulness, but instead of accepting Christ's message to them, they killed the messenger.

And so after His resurrection, the Christian church was established. Now, instead of a chosen people, the gospel would go to the whole world. And a mighty work of God began.

THE EARLY CHURCH

The apostles were simply sharing what Christ had taught them. They kept the commandments of God, they had the testimony of Jesus and they were passionate to reach the world with the news that Jesus Christ was not only alive, but that he was coming again soon! And it spread like wildfire!

There they were, calling people out of tradition, and into truth. Out of legalism and into salvation by faith. You and I can only begin to imagine how difficult it must have been for the Jews to accept Christianity! You see they had to leave all that they knew behind to become true followers of Christ. The book of Hebrews gives us an insight into how hard they were finding it!

Their family, their society, their social structures, everything revolved around Judaism. Previously, for forgiveness they would take an animal as an offering, down to the temple, and meet with the priest. They would confess onto the animal's head and then would take the animal's life. They knew that the priest would then minister in the Sanctuary that they could see and they had physical tangible evidence that God had forgiven them – they could see it!

But now as they became Christians,

- instead of an animal sacrifice, they had to believe that Jesus, who was nowhere to be seen but who was their sacrifice – the lamb that takes away the sin of the world
- no longer did they go to the earthly sanctuary that they could see – they learned to pray directly to God and believe by faith that they were forgiven!
- no longer did they meet with an earthly priest who administered the blood of the animal in the sanctuary, now Jesus Christ was their High Priest in heaven, who ministered his own blood in the sanctuary in heaven!

And all the while that they were learning to follow Jesus by faith, their families, their priests, their friends were condemning and questioning them – how can you be forgiven now? You have no sacrifice, there is no blood to pay for your sin, you have no priest, there is no sanctuary, and Jesus Christ, your leader is dead!

But somehow by the grace of God these early Jewish Christians were more sincere in following the call of Christ than they were in staying with what they had always done. They were more loyal to Christ than they were to their traditions.

DESCENT INTO THE DARK AGES OF SPIRITUAL CONFUSION

But even as the early church began with such fervour and demonstration of the Spirit's power, it wasn't long before personalities and power began to take over from the mission.

Those things which should have been of paramount importance became second place to which church was most powerful. Leaders battled for prominence and slowly but surely the church descended into an age where the gospel was lost to power play and the traditions of men. And as always, church tradition has a way of going against the grain of following the truth as it is in Jesus Christ.

Truth has always had opposition from those with their own agendas:

Acts 20:28-30.

²⁸Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. ²⁹I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. ³⁰Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.

But Paul also foresaw a very sad period of the church's future and foretold it in 1 Thessalonians 2:1,2. *¹Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, ²not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. ³Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for (that day will not come) **until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. ⁴He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.***

Paul says "before that day" – which day? The day Christ comes again, there is going to be a rebellion. The lawless one, the antichrist is going to lead a rebellion in which he exalts himself in opposition to God.

Paul said there was going to come a rebellion, a falling away. Just as there had been a falling away in the church of Israel, here Paul warned that there was going to come a falling away in the Christian church with the revelation of the man of lawlessness, the antichrist.

The lawless one would exalt himself over all that is called God or is worshipped, and set himself up in the place of God. He would invite people to worship him as God on earth and lead the church in a landslide of error, and people would worship him as God.

Earlier in this series we spent some time understanding the identity of the Antichrist. We discovered that the Bible has a lot to say about him. Throughout the Bible he is described and identified. He is the beast of Revelation 13, the little horn of Daniel 7, and the son of perdition. Indeed we saw that he led the church into error and rebellion against the truth of God.

We went over some of the errors that came into the church through this period. What are some of the errors that this man of sin had brought into the Christian church that are not found in the Bible?

Errors of Rome

- The Sabbath was changed to Sunday.
- Idolatry including giving worship to Jesus' mother Mary as a Divine being
- The confession of sins to a priest instead of to Jesus Christ
- Infant baptism instead of adult baptism
- Worship of the dead as Saints
- The infallibility of the pope
- The immortality of the soul, the idea that you go on living after you die in some other place, either purgatory, limbo or hell, or heaven.
- Holy water

These and other errors came into the Christian church during this falling away. The Bible predicted that they would happen and it did.

Psalms 119:105 says

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my paths straight.

Historians refer to this as the Dark Ages, and it's well-named as it was dark. In fact the light of truth had practically gone out.

You may wonder, "Well, why didn't the people object to those teachings? After all it's so clear in the Bible!" You've got to remember that people didn't have the Bible in their hands as we have it today. In fact in 1229 owning, reading or possessing a Bible was actually forbidden and was punishable by severe torture and even death!

The other problem was that the printing press hadn't been invented yet! People had to rely on scribes copying everything out by hand. So only the rich and the lucky owned any books at all! But in time the Bible was translated by a man named John Wycliffe into English and soon after a man named Gutenberg invented the printing press and it was only a matter of time before the church's control over the people was broken.

You see friends there is power in this book! And as it began to fall into the hands of the common man, the truth in its pages brought liberty and strength to anyone who read it. You see they began to learn what is right and true. They began to rely on God's for everything in life instead of the church and tradition. It connected them with a loving God who wants nothing more than to spend eternity with people if only they will respond to His invitation.

Through his word, God began a great work of restoration and revival and He began to raise up men and women who were more loyal to Him than they were to the traditions of the church and of men. You see God's desire is that the world might be ready for Him when He comes.

THE WORD OF GOD and THE GOSPEL RESTORED

Perhaps the most obvious beginning of this reformation that God was bringing about in 1517 in the heart of a Roman Catholic priest by the name of Martin Luther.

You see Luther was tormented by the fact that that he could not keep the law perfectly. The law condemned him. He was a worm in the dust; how could he stand before the Omnipotent Judge? He underwent vigorous austerities to make himself holier, and still could not find assurance and peace with God. During this time he went on an errand to Rome which shook him further. Instead of being impressed with the history and grandeur of the church in Rome, instead, he saw the worldliness and flippancy of the clergy. Something was deeply amiss, and things were not adding up. One day as he climbed the Scala Sancta, a tower with 28 stairs, offering a Pater Noster (The Lord's Prayer in Latin) and a kiss on each stair in order to release a soul from purgatory, at the top he found his faith in all much of what his church was teaching clouded by doubt.

It seemed to him that paying indulgences to the priests could never solve the problem of the human heart. Man needs more than that. Man needs God to forgive him and set him free. The Scriptures that kept coming to his mind were that man had to be saved, justified, by faith alone.

Romans 5:1

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ

Romans 1:17

For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

At the time he was lecturing from the Scriptures and began to teach what he was studying in the Bible. His attention was fixed on the death of Christ, forsaken because of the sins of man that He had taken upon Himself. Man could accept his utter worthlessness and yet take joy in the faith that was made possible through Christ's sacrifice. God was a merciful and righteous father, and not a fierce, quick-tempered judge. In fact you could say that the Reformation began because a God-fearing professor was simply teaching what the Bible had to say.

Luther began to question the church's teaching that people could buy the souls of lost loved ones back from hell, that the pope was infallible, that salvation was a matter of working your way to heaven. As he opened debate on these subjects he was expelled from the church; but with this newfound knowledge of the Bible, many millions joined him in protest against the traditions of the church. Hence it was termed the Protestant Reformation.

Now let me ask you what church was established as people began to follow Luther? You guessed it, this was the beginning of the Lutheran church. I want to tell you that God did a wonderful work through Martin Luther. Luther's creed stemmed from his declaration "Sola Scriptura" – that is latin for the Bible and the Bible alone! And it included the fundamental teaching of the Bible that mankind is saved by only by grace, through faith in Christ!

This truth made it to **England** and what church was established in England? The Church of England. And I tell you that God did a wonderful work through the Anglican Church in England. They believed exactly the same as Luther did, the Bible and the Bible only; the just shall live by faith.

It went up to **Scotland**, and what church was established? The Presbyterian Church. And God did a wonderful work in the Presbyterian church through John Knox, saint of God.

The message went over to **Holland** and which church was established over there in Holland? The Dutch Reformed church. God did a wonderful work through these churches, and the message spread again to millions right through Europe, and later, South Africa as the Dutch settled there, accepted their teachings. The Bible and the Bible only, they said, the just shall live by faith.

Luther's message was a message that **began** the restoration of Bible truth. You might ask, "Why didn't God show Luther everything?" Well, can you imagine what that would have been like? - it

would have been like coming out of a dark tunnel and me shining a great light from a torch into your eyes.

Well let me ask you a question. Given that the church had taken over a thousand years to become entrenched in tradition and error, how long do you think it would take God to completely restore and reform the church to the commandment keeping people in Revelation whose passion was to share the gospel with the world?

As we study history we see that God's work of restoring Bible truth was something that would take several centuries! It was simply not possible to restore in one man's lifetime to undo all that had happened in a thousand years. So God revealed truth to Luther step by step, a little at a time, until Luther died.

And as we might expect, the people that were following what Luther had taught them said, "This is so important, let's draw up a creed now to preserve what we have been shown". And they did. The downside of course is that following the creed became more important than following the God that gave it to them, and instead of asking what God would have them do as they went along, they said in effect, "Well, if Luther taught it, we'll accept it. If Luther didn't teach it, we don't accept it." The problem of course is that God had more He wanted to show them.

TRANSFORMED LIVING RESTORED

Now over in England, two young men, brothers by the names John & Charles Wesley believed the same as the Lutherans and the Anglicans and the Presbyterians in the Bible and the Bible only, and the just shall live by faith. But the Wesleys went one step further, and they said, "We not only believe the good foundation that has been laid there, but we believe that Christ-followers ought to be people whose lives also reflect Christ's life. They began to emphasize the transformation. A change that ought to take place in our life as a person follows Jesus. Allowing our whole lives to be brought under Christ's leadership. They developed methods to help people bring God's transformation into their lives, what is termed in history as the Holiness Movement. And so God did a wonderful work through John and Charles Wesley.

But what we find is that when the Wesley brothers came along and the Lutherans and the Anglicans and the Presbyterians, began to search through their creeds that they had all written up, they said, "Well, Luther didn't emphasize this holiness of living. John Knox didn't say much about this and the Anglican Church has not said much about that. And so those churches moved the Wesleys out of their circles.

In fact they began to criticize the followers of Wesley, saying "You've got a method in your Bible study, you've got a method in your giving to missions, you're nothing more or less than old Methodists". And interestingly enough the name, which was intended as derision, stuck. And so we still have the Methodists with us today.

But notice again what happened. Within just six weeks of Wesley preaching, the Anglican Church put out 623 tracts against him. And you can understand why. Tradition has always been opposed to God restoring Bible truth.

And although Wesley had the truth for that hour, rather than the Lutherans, the Anglicans, and Presbyterians accepting the added light, they pushed them out, put the creed around and wouldn't listen. But do you know, even the Wesleys, saints of God as they were, never understood all the truth either.

In England, there's a little place called Scorbie, and it's from Scorbie that the Pilgrim fathers set sail from Europe and sailed across to begin a new life in America on the Mayflower. Just prior to leaving, a minister by the name of Pr. John Robinson gave a farewell address just as they were about to embark on the Atlantic to sail across to Newfoundland. I'd just like to read you a couple of statements out of the message he preached to them that day. Listen to what he said.

"The Lord knoweth whether ye shall ever see my face again. But whether the Lord hath appointed that or not, I charge you before God and His blessed angels to follow men no further than I have followed Christ. If God should reveal anything to you by any other instrument of His, be ye as ready

*as you ever were to receive any truth, by my ministry. For I am confident that the Lord hath more light and truth to break forth out of His holy word. From my part, I cannot sufficiently bewail the conditions of the reformed churches who have come to a period in religion, and will go no further than the instrument to their reformation. The Lutherans cannot be drawn to go any further than that which Luther taught. And the Calvinists, you see, stuck fast where they were left by that great man of God who yet saw not all things. This is the misery much to be lamented. For though they were bright and shining lights in their time, yet they penetrated not into the whole counsel of God. **But were they now living, would be as willing to embrace further light as that which they first received.**"*

Can you hear the cry of his heart? Pr. Robinson was saying that if Luther was still alive, he wouldn't be a Lutheran. And it was true. If Wesley was still alive he wouldn't be a Methodist. Because those men were saints of God. And when God revealed light to them, they followed it. Pr Robinson challenged these men and women not to follow the reformers but to be like them: To be first and foremost to be Christ-followers, more than they were followers of even great men like Luther or Wesley. And this same challenge comes to people and will always come to people until Christ returns.

Let's see how time moved them on. You see it's important to remember that all of these churches, Methodists, Presbyterians, Anglicans, and Lutherans all had some erroneous beliefs still in common. And one of them which God was about to restore to truth was the teaching of infant baptism.

BAPTISM BY IMMERSION RESTORED

Now when God wanted to bring the Biblical truth of baptism by immersion to the fore, you can probably guess who He was about to bring onto the scene!

The Baptists. I tell you, what a wonderful work God did through the Baptists, a beautiful church that were part of restoring truth to the world. And history details for us the bitter persecution they experienced because of it.

You've heard of John Bunion, the man who wrote Pilgrim's Progress? Do you know, he wrote that book in Bedford Jail in England? He had two little girls at home who he hardly saw because he suffered there, rather than recant. He said, "How can I deny my God when I know that the Bible teaches baptism by immersion? I cannot recant." So he stayed there for twelve years. (Those jail years back then were not like jail today). When he was asked, "Was it all worth it?" he said, "*It was mercy to suffer for so just a cause*".

The Baptists suffered mercilessly at the hands of those churches who bitterly opposed them. The Baptists, you see, believed like the Lutherans, the Presbyterians, the Methodists, and the Anglicans, "the Bible and the Bible only", and "the just shall live by faith". They believed like the Wesley brothers in holiness of life. But they had moved one step further and they said that the Bible teaches baptism by immersion. They began to emphasize this. And hundreds and thousands stepped out and followed them.

But the vast majority of the Wesleyans said that if Wesley didn't preach baptism by immersion, and they couldn't find that emphasized in Wesley's teachings, they said, get out. And when the Anglicans, and the Lutherans went through their creeds, they didn't emphasize much about this, and John Knox didn't emphasize much about this, so it was out with anyone who believed this new teaching. So these churches that were once the truth of God, opposed further light, and turned their backs on those who were actually holding to Luther's original creed of Sola Scriptura – The bible and the Bible alone!

THE SOON COMING OF CHRIST and SPIRIT OF PROPHECY RESTORED

Yet the Baptists, saints of God as they were, didn't have all the light either. When God wanted to emphasize some more truth,

He raised up another people called the Adventists. They believed, like the Lutherans, the Methodists, the Presbyterians and the Anglicans, "the Bible and the Bible only", and "the just shall live by faith". They believed like the Wesley brothers in holiness of life. They believed like the

Baptists in baptism by immersion. But they went one step further. They began to study and understand the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation that we have been studying together in this series, and they came to the conclusion that Jesus Christ was soon to return. In fact, just like all the movements before them, this belief characterized their name – Adventists – you know what it means? The Second Coming of Christ is also known as the 2nd Advent, hence the name Adventists. So in fact if you're a person who is looking forward to the 2nd coming of Christ then you can consider yourself an Adventist!

And from the reading of the church history, the greatest revival since Pentecost was the revival that took place as people began to discover in the prophecies that Jesus Christ was coming soon! It was a time of God's Spirit moving mightily!

Well you can guess what the reaction of the established churches was like as this message began to go out across the land! The Lutherans looked through their creed, and they said, "you'll have to leave". The Anglicans said, "you'll have to leave". The Presbyterians said, the same, as did the Wesleyans, and the Baptists. Ironically, due to their stance on the Bible and the Bible alone, the same creed as the original reformer, they were no longer welcome in their churches and a new movement began. Yet again we see that man's tradition rarely, if ever welcomes God's truth in His word.

But even those early Adventists, saints of God as they were, never understood all the truth either because this little group of Adventists still had two major errors their understanding of the Bible. One was they believed that Sunday was the Sabbath, and the other was the immortality of the soul. They were still teaching these like all the other churches before them.

KEEPING THE COMMANDMENTS & UNDERSTANDING OF DEATH RESTORED

But as God brought the final marks of the reformation to completion, he brought to them a knowledge of the Bible Sabbath, and an Biblical understanding of death and the soul, and they accepted it. The group eventually took the name Seventh-Day Adventists, but more importantly, they were a people who like Luther and those before them believed in the Bible and the Bible only, that we are saved only by faith in the grace of God. They believed that true followers of Christ will also be Christ-like in the way they live and look after themselves, they believed in baptism by immersion. They believed in the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation and that Jesus is coming soon. And looking at the book of Revelation they see God's last day people, His Remnant, and desire to be faithful to Jesus above all else.

Quite in contrast to what happened during the Dark Ages, I love what Proverbs 4:18 has to say:
¹⁸ The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day.

The Bible teaches that the closer we get to the coming of Jesus, the more we'll understand about truth. It remains essential that we resolve never just to follow something simply because it is familiar to us. Instead let us resolve only to follow Jesus Christ as our leader and Lord.

You see what's important is not the name of the church we carry. God's remnant people were never characterized by their name, but by their love and commitment to Jesus Christ as their Saviour and his Word as the only light for their path. They are His remnant, a people called to patient endurance as they follow him and prepare the world for his coming.

Revelation 14:12 says

¹²This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.

As you look at the remnant, can you see that it resembles the original? Can you see that they have the same foundation which the church was founded on originally, the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus?

Friends, the good news is that despite a major falling away in the Christian church, through Godly men and women who have remain faithful to Him, step by step God has restored a knowledge of truth until the remnant once again resembles the original.

God's leading has been evident throughout the ages. We have seen that God led in the establishment of every one of the churches we have mentioned tonight. But today, God is calling men and women to follow Him

He says in John 10:16

¹⁴"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.

Just as He called each reformer to take a stand for the Bible truth as God revealed it to them he now calls people everywhere to make a decision to follow him 100% - a whole life surrender to Jesus Christ.

Revelation 14 says these people are the reformers, the last in a long line of truth restorers, the remnant who have the privilege of taking God's last day message to every nation, kindred, tongue and people, calling people out of spiritual Babylon, out of spiritual confusion, and into a true knowledge of the Bible and experience with Jesus Christ. Listen to their cry to all of God's true people everywhere:

Revelation 18:3-4

Fallen, Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird. For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from from her excessive luxuries. (there's the warning again)

But now hear the invitation in the next verse:

"Come out of her my people."

Whose people? God says MY PEOPLE.

In these last days God is calling HIS PEOPLE from wherever they are to be part of His proclaiming His last warning to the world before He returns.

I want to be part of what God is doing to bring great news to people in the city where God has planted me. I want to be part of God's invitation to people everywhere people of every nation, culture and language, to come out of spiritual confusion and join the great work that God is doing in preparing the hearts of people for his soon coming.

I want to invite you to consider the calling God may be placing on your life tonight. Do you choose to follow Jesus Christ as the leader and Lord of your life? Will you determine in your heart to follow him completely in a 100% surrender as He leads you to follow him? Do you wish to join others who have accepted the call to be part of His remnant? I pray that you will.

Next Lesson #16 – The Will and Character of God