

The Gentle Revolution

The Healing Truth Behind Remnant Church Movement

The research couldn't be clearer—church attendance and involvement predicts good mental health. While the separatism and critical spirit that at times appear in a religious context predict problems such as depression, most church attendees become healthier rather than less healthy.¹ In other words religion tends to be good for us!

One of the factors contributing to what scientists call positive religious coping is the individual's picture of God. The doctrines, or teachings, of the Bible make a very positive contribution here. They help to build in our minds an accurate, comprehensive concept of God's character.

Yet Christianity can't seem to agree on doctrine. The multiplying of denominations, largely due to doctrinal differences, testifies to this. Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary reports that there are 41,000 Christian denominations today.¹

This condition is not chargeable to God, because He is not the “author of confusion, but of peace” (1 Corinthians 14:33). Paul called “the church of the living God” “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). Apparently God has tasked the church with carrying the light of truth in the midst of a dark world. But agreeing on what the truth is, that's another matter!

To help guide us in the process of choosing a light-bearing church, we'll look at three biblical analogies for the church: the sheepfold, the woman giving birth, and the remnant.

The Sheepfold

In John 10:14-16, Jesus described His followers as a sheepfold:

I am the good Shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.

Sheep are dumb animals. In July of 2005, a lone sheep in Istanbul, Turkey walked to the edge of a cliff and, for some unknown reason, jumped to its death. Amazingly, one sheep after another followed in its train until 1500 sheep had jumped over the same cliff! The only reason 1050 sheep survived the ordeal is that they were cushioned by the dead sheep.ⁱⁱ Can you imagine the mindset of the last sheep as it contemplated the jump? *Surely, 1499 sheep can't be wrong, can they?*

¹ <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1388014>

Jesus says that in the end, “There will be one flock and one shepherd” (vs. 16). But notice this important statement about the sheep: “They will hear my voice” (vs. 16). Christ’s true sheep *hear His voice*, and by hearing are led to the *one flock*.

What is His voice? In 2 Timothy 3:16 we read that Scripture is inspired, or “God-breathed.” In phonation, vocal folds vibrate as air is expelled, or breathed, from the lungs. When God breathed, He produced the Scriptures, His voice to all the sheep on planet earth. When Jesus’ sheep hear His *voice*, they hear His voice of truth, coming into the *one fold*.

The Woman Giving Birth

The most extensive prophecy about the church is found in Revelation 12:1-17. Using the Bible itself as interpreter, we’ll observe how these passages have been fulfilled.

Prophecy: In this passage we find a pure woman “clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars” (Revelation 12:1).

Interpretation: The Bible uses women to symbolize religious bodies. Paul said, “I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:2). The pure woman of Revelation 12 symbolizes the pure church, “clothed with” and surrounded by bodies of light, immersed in the light of God’s Word.

Another woman in Revelation sits “on a scarlet beast which was full of the names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns” (Revelation 17:3). This woman astride the beast is “arrayed in purple and scarlet and adorned with precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abomination and the filthiness of her fornication” (vs. 4). This woman has “Babylon the Great” written on her forehead and she is “drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus” (vs. 5-6).

These two women—the pure, pregnant woman and the harlot of Babylon—symbolize two religious bodies, one truly representing God, and the other falsely representing Him.

Prophecy: The pure woman was “pregnant” and “cried out in labor and pain to give birth” (vs. 2). This child was to “rule all nations with a rod of iron” (vs. 5).

Interpretation: For centuries the people of God awaited the coming of the Messiah who would “rule the nations with a rod of iron” connoting great strength (Revelation 19:15). Out of the “church” of that time, the Jewish nation, came Jesus Christ the Messiah, the all-powerful, sovereign God in human form.

Prophecy: “A great, fiery red dragon” appeared, “having seven heads and ten horns” and stood ready to “devour her Child as soon as it was born” (vs. 3-4).

Interpretation: When he heard about the Messiah's birth, a jealous King Herod ordered the slaying of all the baby boys in Jerusalem. Another Roman official, Pilate, ordered the crucifixion of Jesus. Satan, the dragon, attempted to destroy the Messiah through Roman leaders.

Prophecy: "Her child was caught up to God and His throne" (vs. 5).

Interpretation: Jesus rose again and ascended to the right hand of His Father (See Mark 16:19; Luke 24:51; Acts 1:1-12).

Prophecy: "The woman fled into the wilderness, where she had a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days" (vs. 6; See also vs. 14).

Interpretation: In prophetic time, one day equals a year (See Ezekiel 4:6). The 1260 days equals 1260 years. This period, called the Dark Ages, began in 538 when Rome became a church-state under the emperor Justinian, who gave the Catholic Church universal civil authority. The end of the period came after 1260 bloody years of papal dominance and persecution. During this period "heretics"—meaning anyone who refused to render unquestioning obedience to the papacy—suffered persecution. Some historians estimate the death toll to be as high as 50 million! Many who died suffered martyrdom at the hands of other professed Christians who believed they were doing God service (See John 16:2).

But as is so often the case, oppression eventually fostered a backlash; in this case it was the French Revolution. In reaction to years of papal dominance the French flouted religion. In 1798 General Berthier took the pope captive, deporting him to a foreign land where he died in exile. This ushered in the "Age of Reason" during which atheism became the dominant "religion" of Europe.

Strangely, Christianity as a state religion attacked true Christians, particularly Sabbathkeepers who would not honor the pope's edicts over the Word of God! During this period, devoted followers of Jesus such as the Waldensians and the Huguenots hid in the wild places of Europe.

Prophecy: Now we read what happened after the woman fled: "The serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth" (vs. 15-16).

Interpretation: Ever bent on blotting out the church, the serpent vomits on the woman in an act of persecution. Again, the woman finds refuge in "the earth" or a wild place as opposed to a populated place (See Revelation 17:15). This alludes to the refuge God's people took in the New World, America.

The prophecy continues, identifying the church as the remnant.

The Remnant

Prophecy: “And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 12:17).

Interpretation: The word “rest,” often translated “remnant,” is from the Greek *leipo*, which means “lacking” or “left behind.” A remnant is the last piece of cloth on a bolt of fabric. Notice that this remnant appears *after* the 1260-day period ends. As we probe history for the remnant, we must find a group that began after 1798.

Prophecy: There are other very special qualifications given of this remnant—they “keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 12:17).

Interpretation: The pure woman, the truth-telling church, would rather obey God than man (See Acts 5:29). The remnant people also have the testimony of Jesus Christ, which is identified in Revelation 19:10 as “the spirit of prophecy.” The spiritual gifts, in particular the gift of prophecy, are active in the remnant church.

Revelation so far lists the characteristics of God’s people as:

- Surrounded with the light of God’s Word
- Contrasting with Babylon
- Appearing after 1798
- Appearing in America
- Called “the remnant”
- Keeping the commandments of God
- Having the faith of Jesus
- Embracing the spiritual gift of prophecy

Does such a church exist?

Is There a Fit?

Is there a church today that fits these biblical descriptions?

Seventh-day Adventist have long identified themselves as the remnant church of Bible prophecy, noting several facts: The church grew in America out of the Millerite movement of the early 1800s, after the 1798 end of papal reign of Europe. “Adventism,” as we call it, honors the Ten Commandments, particularly the seventh day Sabbath as established by God at creation and upheld by Jesus. This puts the Adventist Church in sharp contrast with the churches that honor Sunday. The Seventh-day Adventist Church honors the spiritual gifts, including the gift of prophecy, which, the church teaches, God gave to the author Ellen White.

The question that remains is: Does the Seventh-day Adventist Church keep God’s commandment of love? God’s end-time followers will love one another. They have “the faith of Jesus” and faith works by love (See Galatians 5:6). We may with pride check every doctrinal box, but if we fail to live the love of God, we are not, in the fullest sense, God’s true church.

To the end-time church, Laodicea, Jesus says:

Because you say, “I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing”—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. Revelation 3:17-18.

A church may be rich in knowledge and wealthy in membership and growth and still lack:

Gold tried in the fire- or faith working by love;
White garments- the righteousness of Christ;
Eye salve- humble awareness of our condition.

The Takeaway

Jesus prayed that believers would be “one, as You, Father, are in Me and I am in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me” (John 17:21). Mutual love based on Bible truth is powerful evidence for the Christian faith. Studying the truths of God’s Word gives us an opportunity to come together on a firm foundation, flourishing in love for one another. Only that flourishing love will complete the work that God has begun in His truth-telling family. Love is the power behind the gentle revolution.

Quiz

1. One of the factors contributing to what scientists call _____ is the individual’s picture of God.
2. Jesus said that in the end there would be one _____ and one Shepherd.
3. What is God’s voice? The _____.
4. The pure woman/church in Revelation 12 is presented in sharp contrast to what other woman/church? _____
5. The pure woman/church appears in America after what date? _____
6. The pure woman/church keeps the _____ of God.
7. The pure woman/church also has the faith of Jesus, which works by _____.
8. The pure woman/church embraces the gift of _____.

Answer Key

1. Positive religious coping
2. Flock
3. Bible
4. Babylon
5. 1798
6. Commandments
7. Love
8. Prophecy



ⁱ Checkout <http://christianity.about.com/od/denominations/p/christiantoday.htm> or the GC website at www.gordonconwell.edu.

ⁱⁱ The Associated Press, 2005, posted in USA Today online at http://www.usatoday.com/news/offbeat/2005-07-08-sheep-suicide_x.htm