
Why So Many Denominations?



ADHERENTS.COM estimates there are more than 3,000 religious denominations/sects/faith groups worldwide. Perhaps one of these is the true church; perhaps none is. Perhaps they all manifest different parts of true religion. It could be that the true church existed in the past, but was driven out of existence. Or maybe Jesus never meant to found a church, so the true church doesn't exist.

Is it even relevant? So many religions claim to be the true church. Maybe it's the one that's the most successful. Let's settle the question by looking at the only trustworthy source of truth—God's Word.

Thoughts to Remember:

- ♦ Revelation 6 describes several seals, which provide valuable information about the true church as well as past churches.
- ♦ **Seal 1:** "And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals...and behold a white horse; and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering and to conquer" (Revelation 6:1, 2). In vision, John saw the New Testament church: a white horse to symbolize victory, bow and arrow to symbolize it was armed with the Word and the Holy Spirit. This can be called Christ's Conquering Church. Thousands were added to this church day by day and the church was strong in the Christian graces. The motto was "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). As long as this early church made the Scriptures its only guide, it remained pure in knowledge of the truth.
- ♦ **Seal 2:** "Another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another, and there was given to him a great sword" (Revelation 6:4). Satan, seeing the triumph of the Christian church, mounted a vicious counterattack. From about AD 100 to AD 323, Roman armies marched against Christians in a bloodstained campaign of persecution. Early Roman writer Tertullian wrote, "The blood of martyrs is the seed of the gospel." Converts sprang up faster than Rome could kill them. Satan discovered he could not destroy the church through persecution.
- ♦ **Seal 3:** "When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, Come and see. So I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he that sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the living creatures saying, 'A quart of wheat for a denarius [penny], and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine'" (Revelation 6:5, 6). The fourth and fifth centuries were the black horse period; Christians

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received little solid spiritual food. With the Roman empire crumbling and pagans invading from the north, church leaders brought paganism and Christianity together in a desperate attempt to save the empire. Salvation by faith was replaced with church requirements; pagan gods were renamed as Biblical saints. The goal was to make the church more comfortable for the incoming pagans. This is when church and civil leaders began to change the true Sabbath into Sunday.

♦ Seal 4: "When he opened the fourth seal... So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on him was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with the sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth" (Revelation 6:7, 8). The Christian church had moved through a period of purity, then persecution, then compromise. During the Dark Ages, Christians' lives and knowledge of Scripture truth were both taken away. Newly converted pagans were still pagans in fact. Church councils and traditions still took the place of God and His Word. Salvation was taught to be by works instead of by faith. Images and saints took the place of the Holy Spirit, and Sunday took the place of Sabbath. Church law and state power united, and those who didn't submit were killed. During this time God raised up the Waldensians, Bible believers who took refuge in the mountains between Italy and France. God raised up John Wycliffe to translate the Bible into English; John Huss, a Reformation martyr; Martin Luther, and many others.

♦ The Waldensians followed Peter Waldo. Lutherans followed Luther. But Waldo and Luther didn't have the entire gospel. Their followers said, "But Waldo [or Luther, or Huss] didn't teach this, and if he didn't teach it, why should we accept it?" You begin to see where all the different denominations came from. God raised up John Calvin in Geneva, and the Presbyterian church was born. Anabaptists in Europe discovered and followed the Bible teaching on baptism by immersion; later they became the Baptist denomination. God gave each movement a piece of truth to preserve so that His last-day movement could be raised up with the full truth. All the truths that most people have lost sight of are to be found before the Second Coming.

♦ In the 1800s God raised up William Miller to study prophecies about the Second Coming. He began to preach the Bible truths about the advent of Jesus, and thousands accepted Jesus. What truth had not yet been restored? The truth of the seventh day Sabbath. God raised up Miller and other leaders of the Advent movement to bring this Bible truth into the church again. "If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your own pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight... the holy day of the Lord, honorable" (Isaiah 58:12, 13).

♦ "Here is the patience [endurance] of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12). God's last-day people believe the Bible and the Bible only. These last-day people will believe in the Second Coming (or Advent) and will keep the Sabbath. They will be Sabbath-keeping Adventist Christians. No other denomination is giving the trumpet call to restore all the Bible truths. For every truth, Satan has a counterfeit: church authority for God's authority, salvation by works instead of by faith, intercession for us by Christ versus by a human priest, baptism by sprinkling or by immersion... the list is long.

The "take-home" message for you . . .

♦ Are you concerned about losing your job? Losing friends or family? It may help to remember some of the periods of persecution in the Christian church—times when faithfulness to God ended in a cruel death. Never doubt that God is with you. You may be afraid; the future may look dark. But reach out and take Jesus' hand. You may be weak, but He is strong.

Just between you . . . and God:

♦ Now you know Bible truths; you can tell the truth from Satan's counterfeits. God invites you to commit your life to Him as the Holy Spirit moves on your heart and conscience.

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