

What Do You Say Regarding the Identifying Marks of the New Testament Church

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1/22/2012

Introduction

What do you say when people ask you about the church? Are you prepared to give an answer concerning the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence (1 Pet. 3:15)? Is it possible to find simple and pure New Testament Christianity in a religious world filled with conflict, confusion, and division? Does the church that Christ established still exist today? Can it be identified? The answer to these questions is a resounding “Yes!”

1 Peter 3:15 ... 15 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; (NASB95)

The church of Jesus Christ was established according to the eternal purpose of God (Eph. 3:8-11). The kingdom of God will stand forever (Dan. 2:44; Heb. 12:28). From a Biblical standpoint, the church and the kingdom are synonymous (Matt. 16:18-19; Col. 1:13-14, 18). Therefore, we can be confident that the church of our Lord still exists today.

Ephesians 3:8-11 ... 8 To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; 10 so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. 11 This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, (NASB95)

Daniel 2:44 ... 44 “In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever. (NASB95)

Hebrews 12:28 ... 28 Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; (NASB95)

Matthew 16:18-19 ... 18 “I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. 19 “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.” (NASB95)

Colossians 1:13-14, 18 ... 13 For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. 18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. (NASB95)

Yet, the question remains, “How can the Lord’s church be identified?” By studying the divine pattern. Let us, therefore, search the Scriptures for those identifying characteristics of the New Testament church. The church that conforms itself to this divine pattern is the church that Christ will accept as His own.

Its Establishment

The New Testament Church was founded by Christ (Matt. 16:16-18; Acts 20:28) in Jerusalem (Isa. 2:1-3; Luke 24:46-49) on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 1:4-9; 2:1-4, 14-17, 32, 36-41, 47).

Matthew 16:16-18 ... 16 Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” 17 And Jesus said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 18 “I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. (NASB95)

Acts 20:28 ... 28 “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. (NASB95)

Isaiah 2:1-3 ... 1 The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. 2 Now it will come about that In the last days The mountain of the house of the Lord Will be established as the chief of the mountains, And will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it. 3 And many peoples will come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, To the house of the God of Jacob; That He may teach us concerning His ways And that we may walk in His paths.” For the law will go forth from Zion And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. (NASB95)

Luke 24:46-49 ... 46 and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, 47 and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 “You are witnesses of these things. 49 “And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” (NASB95)

Acts 1:4-9 ... 4 Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, “Which,” He said, “you heard of from Me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” 6 So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” 7 He said to them, “It

is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; 8 but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” 9 And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. (NASB95)

Acts 2:1-4 ... 1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance. (NASB95)

Acts 2:14-17 ... 14 But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: “Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words. 15 “For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day; 16 but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: 17 ‘And it shall be in the last days,’ God says, ‘That I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, And your young men shall see visions, And your old men shall dream dreams; (NASB95)

Acts 2:32 ... 32 “This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. (NASB95)

Acts 2:36-41 ... 36 “Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.” 37 Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?” 38 Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 “For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.” 40 And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation!” 41 So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. (NASB95)

Acts 2:47 ... 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. (NASB95)

Acts 2:47 ... 47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. (KJV)

However, churches of men have the wrong founders (Martin Luther, John Wesley, Joseph Smith, Charles T. Russell, etc.). Moreover, they were founded in the wrong places (Rome, Europe, England, and America) and at the wrong times (16th-20th centuries).

Its Designations

The New Testament Church was called by the following names: The church of God (1 Cor. 1:2); the churches of Christ (Rom. 16:16); the kingdom of His dear Son (Col. 1:13-14); the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23); the temple of God (Eph. 2:19-21); the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:22-33); the household of God (1 Tim. 3:15); the vineyard of the Lord (Matt. 20:1-2). Individually members of the Lord's church are called disciples or Christians. Notice how all these names give glory and honor to either the Father or His Son.

1 Corinthians 1:2 ... 2 To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours: (NASB95)

Romans 16:16 ... 16 Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you. (NASB95)

Colossians 1:13-14 ... 13 For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (NASB95)

Ephesians 1:22-23 ... 22 And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. (NASB95)

Ephesians 2:19-21 ... 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, (NASB95)

Ephesians 5:22-33 ... 22 Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. 24 But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, 26 so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. 28 So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; 29 for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, 30 because we are members of His body. 31 For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. 32 This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. 33 Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband. (NASB95)

1 Timothy 3:15 ... 15 but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. (NASB95)

Matthew 20:1-2 ... 1 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. 2 "When he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard. (NASB95)

Each of these names suggest something of the relationship we share with God and one another. For example, the word "church" indicates that we are "called out" of the world to serve Christ. The expression "house of God" indicates that we are born again into His spiritual house or family. The phrase "body of Christ" indicates that we together compose the body over which Christ is the head. The title "kingdom of God" reveals that Christ is our Lord, Ruler and King. In turn, we must be His loyal subjects.

In contrast, churches of men wear names that often glorify some man, idea, or method. For example, the Lutheran church honors the name of Martin Luther, the great Protestant reformer. Presbyterians honor a certain form of church government espoused by their founder John Calvin. The Baptists honor immersion more than the one who ordained it. The Pentecostals idealize the miracles of Pentecost above the teachings they were to confirm.

Its Rule Of Faith

The church that is pleasing to God will follow the New Testament as its only rule of faith and practice (Rom. 1:16-17; 2 Tim. 3:14-17; 1 Pet. 4:11). Faithful disciples of Christ will not add to, diminish from, or change God's commandments in any way (Matt. 15:7-9; Gal. 1:6-9; 2 John 9).

Romans 1:16-17 ... 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the righteous man shall live by faith." (NASB95)

2 Timothy 3:14-17 ... 14 You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15 and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (NASB95)

1 Peter 4:11 ... 11 Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (NASB95)

Matthew 15:7-9 ... 7 “You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: 8 ‘This people honors Me with their lips, 1 But their heart is far away from Me. 9 ‘But in vain do they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.’ “ (NASB95)

Galatians 1:6-9 ... 6 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; 7 which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! 9 As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed! (NASB95)

2 John 9 ... 9 Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. (NASB95)

However, churches of men often follow man-made creeds and human traditions. They show a lack of respect for God’s Word by changing it to suit their own preferences. They choose what commandments they will obey, and ignore the rest.

Its Worship

The New Testament Church worshipped as God directed. Early disciples partook of the Lord’s Supper on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:23-25). They also generously contributed of their means (1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 9:6-7). They lifted their voices in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Eph. 5:18-19; Col. 3:16). They offered up prayers and supplications unto God (Phil. 4:6-7; 1 Tim. 2:8). They devoted themselves to the proclamation of God’s Word (Acts 2:42; 2 Tim. 2:2).

Acts 20:7 ... 7 On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight. (NASB95)

1 Corinthians 11:23-25 ... 23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, “This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” 25 In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.” (NASB95)

1 Corinthians 16:1-2 ... 1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. 2 On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come. (NASB95)

2 Corinthians 9:6-7 ... 6 Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 Each one must do just as he has

purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (NASB95)

Ephesians 5:18-19 ... 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; (NASB95)

Colossians 3:16 ... 16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (NASB95)

Philippians 4:6-7 ... 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (NASB95)

1 Timothy 2:8 ... 8 Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension. (NASB95)

Acts 2:42 ... 42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (NASB95)

2 Timothy 2:2 ... 2 The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. (NASB95)

However, modern day denominations have changed the worship of the New Testament church in more ways than Jeroboam perverted the worship of ancient Israel. They have altered the frequency of the Lord's supper, its elements, and its purpose. They have added instrumental music to the singing. They insist upon tithing instead of free-will offerings, and also use raffles, bingo, bake sales, etc. to raise money. Instead of recognizing Christ as their mediator, many pray in the name of Mary or some other "saint." Much of their teaching is not Scripturally oriented. They preach a message soothing to the ears.

Its Work

The work of the New Testament church was threefold: evangelism, edification and limited benevolence. (1) **Evangelism**. This is the primary duty of the church. It must preach the gospel to a lost and dying world (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 8:4; 1 Tim. 3:15); (2) **Edification**. The church must help its members grow and develop spiritually (Eph. 4:11-16; Heb. 10:23-25; 1 Pet. 2:1-2); (3) **Benevolence**. The church must provide for needy saints in their time of affliction (Acts 4:34-35; 11:27-30; 1 Tim. 5:3-16).

Matthew 28:18-20 ... 18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (NASB95)

Acts 8:4 ... 4 Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word. (NASB95)

1 Timothy 3:15 ... 15 but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. (NASB95)

Ephesians 4:11-16 ... 11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. (NASB95)

Hebrews 10:23-25 ... 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; 24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. (NASB95)

1 Peter 2:1-2 ... 1 Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, 2 like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, (NASB95)

Acts 4:34-35 ... 34 For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales 35 and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need. (NASB95)

Acts 11:27-30 ... 27 Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 One of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius. 29 And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. 30 And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders. (NASB95)

1 Timothy 5:3-16 ... 3 Honor widows who are widows indeed; 4 but if any widow has children or grandchildren, they must first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family and to make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God. 5 Now she who is a widow indeed and who has been left alone, has fixed her hope on God and continues in entreaties and prayers night and day. 6 But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives. 7 Prescribe these things as well, so that

they may be above reproach. 8 But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. 9 A widow is to be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old, having been the wife of one man, 10 having a reputation for good works; and if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has assisted those in distress, and if she has devoted herself to every good work. 11 But refuse to put younger widows on the list, for when they feel sensual desires in disregard of Christ, they want to get married, 12 thus incurring condemnation, because they have set aside their previous pledge. 13 At the same time they also learn to be idle, as they go around from house to house; and not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, talking about things not proper to mention. 14 Therefore, I want younger widows to get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach; 15 for some have already turned aside to follow Satan. 16 If any woman who is a believer has dependent widows, she must assist them and the church must not be burdened, so that it may assist those who are widows indeed. (NASB95)

However, churches of men often become engaged in works that God never authorized. Instead of carrying out its divine mission, many churches today have become involved in secular education, recreation and entertainment, general benevolence, business enterprises, and political activities. The saving gospel has been replaced by a "social gospel" in most modern churches.

Its Organization

Christ occupies a position of supreme authority over the church (Matt. 16:15-18; 28:18-20; Eph. 1:20-23). From a universal standpoint, each congregation is directly subject to Christ. The only functional unit of the church is the local congregation (1 Cor. 1:2; Phil. 1:1). Each is independent and autonomous (Acts 14:23).

*Matthew 16:15-18 ... 15 He *said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 18 "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. (NASB95)*

Matthew 28:18-20 ... 18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (NASB95)

Ephesians 1:20-23 ... 20 which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. 22 And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. (NASB95)

1 Corinthians 1:2 ... 2 To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours: (NASB95)

Philippians 1:1 ... 1 Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons: (NASB95)

Acts 14:23 ... 23 When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (NASB95)

Local congregations must be arranged after the Biblical pattern. Elders are to oversee and rule the flock (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2-3). Deacons should minister to the physical needs of the members (Acts 6:1-6; Phil. 1:1). Evangelists proclaim the gospel of Christ (1 Tim. 4:6, 11-12; 2 Tim. 4:1-5). Members actively encourage one another and reach out to the lost (Heb. 5:12; 10:24-25).

Acts 20:28 ... 28 “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. (NASB95)

1 Peter 5:2-3 ... 2 shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; 3 nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. (NASB95)

Acts 6:1-6 ... 1 Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. 2 So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. 3 “Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. 4 “But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” 5 The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. 6 And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them. (NASB95)

Philippians 1:1 ... 1 Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons: (NASB95)

1 Timothy 4:6, 11-12 ... 6 In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following. 11 Prescribe and teach these things. 12 Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe. (NASB95)

2 Timothy 4:1-5 ... 1 I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, 4 and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. 5 But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. (NASB95)

Hebrews 5:12 ... 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. (NASB95)

Hebrews 10:24-25 ... 24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. (NASB95)

However, churches of men have made drastic and unauthorized changes in the organization of the church. They ignore God's plan for congregational autonomy by creating synods, councils, conventions, federations, and other forms of ecclesiastical hierarchies. Yet, one cannot read of arch-bishops, popes, or brotherhood elders in the New Testament.

Its Membership

The New Testament Church faithfully proclaimed God's plan of redemption: Sinners must hear God's Word (John 6:44-45; Rom. 10:17), believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (John 8:24; Heb. 11:6), repent of their sins (Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30), confess their faith (Matt. 10:32; Rom. 10:9-10), and be baptized for the remission of sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16). Baptized believers are committed to a life of faithful service (1 Cor. 15:58; Rev. 2:10).

John 6:44-45 ... 44 "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. 45 "It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught of God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me. (NASB95)

Romans 10:17 ... 17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. (NASB95)

John 8:24 ... 24 "Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins." (NASB95)

Hebrews 11:6 ... 6 And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. (NASB95)

Luke 13:3 ... 3 "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. (NASB95)

Acts 17:30 ... 30 “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, (NASB95)

Matthew 10:32 ... 32 “Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. (NASB95)

Romans 10:9-10 ... 9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; 10 for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. (NASB95)

Mark 16:16 ... 16 “He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. (NASB95)

Acts 2:38 ... 38 Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (NASB95)

Acts 22:16 ... 16 ‘Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.’ (NASB95)

1 Corinthians 15:58 ... 58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord. (NASB95)

Revelation 2:10 ... 10 ‘Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. (NASB95)

However, churches of men have changed God’s simple scheme of salvation. They reverse the order of these steps. Many say that repentance comes before faith. Those who practice infant baptism think that baptism comes before faith. Most denominations hold to the doctrine of faith only. They deny that baptism is essential to salvation. If they practice baptism at all, they change its purpose by saying that it is a sign that one has already been saved.

Its Discipline

The New Testament Church was submissive to divine discipline (2 Tim. 3:14-17; Heb. 12:5-11). Instructive discipline involves teaching and training that regulates character and conduct. Corrective discipline is reserved for those who rebel against God’s Word, serving to reprove and restore the sinner (1 Tim. 1:18-20). It also purifies and purges the church of evil (1 Cor. 5:7-13).

2 Timothy 3:14-17 ... 14 You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15 and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is inspired

by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (NASB95)

Hebrews 12:5-11 ... 5 and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, Nor faint when you are reprovved by Him; 6 For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, And He scourges every son whom He receives.” 7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. 11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. (NASB95)

1 Timothy 1:18-20 ... 18 This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight, 19 keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. 20 Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme. (NASB95)

1 Corinthians 5:7-13 ... 7 Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. 8 Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. 9 I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; 10 I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. 11 But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. 12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? 13 But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves. (NASB95)

However, churches of men do not practice either instructive or corrective discipline. Instead of expounding the apostle’s doctrine, they titillate with trivialities. Instead of opposing sin, error and false doctrine, they fellowship the same.

Conclusion

The church we read of in the Bible has certain identifying characteristics. God’s Word sets forth its origin, names, rule of faith, work, worship, organization, and terms of membership. Any church today that conforms itself to this divine pattern is the church that the Lord will accept. It is right and cannot be wrong.

Some would argue, “It doesn’t matter what you believe or practice, so long as you are sincere.” Others say, “All roads lead to heaven.” However, this simply is not so (Matt. 7:21-23; Luke 6:46). Denominationalism, and all the division it brings, is contrary to the Bible’s plea for unity (John 17:20-21; 1 Cor. 1:10). Let us strive to pattern ourselves after the New Testament order (Matt. 28:18-20; Col. 3:17).

Matthew 7:21-23 ... 21 “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. 22 “Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ 23 “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’ (NASB95)

Luke 6:46 ... 46 “Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? (NASB95)

John 17:20-21 ... 20 “I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; 21 that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. (NASB95)

1 Corinthians 1:10 ... 10 Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. (NASB95)

Matthew 28:18-20 ... 18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (NASB95)

Colossians 3:17 ... 17 Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. (NASB95)