

A GUIDE TO FIND THE TRUE CHURCH

A GUIDE TO THE OLD PATHS

The world is religiously sick in that one does not know which way to follow (Jeremiah 6:16). Man has, in his efforts to accord God an acceptable service, gone as far as propounding (teaching) strange doctrines and holding to tenets (beliefs) that have become a complete violation of the teachings of Christ (II John 9:11; Galatians 1:8-9; I Peter 4:11).

The world has also rejected the inspired directives of the One that is vested with “all authority in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18). Consequently, this rebellious act in man has supplied him with a strong delusion so that he could not see the need to secure a hopeful relationship with God in the body of Christ, the church.

Today, many have ignorantly grounded their faith in an unscriptural idea which states that “church is not important.” With this religiously bigoted belief, man has gone into competition with Jesus in His statement “I will build My church” (Matthew 16:18). Those who have this conviction are unashamedly promoting this heretical dogma because they do not know what the Bible says about the “church.”

I reserve no blame for such people because they are unaware of the eternal purpose of God in his plan of salvation. Also, I would not hold this against them for the fact that they are offspring of the “great harlot,” and as a result, have been trained to drag the church into apostasy.

It is this that the writer has taken the pain to write, without bias, a brief guide to the church of the first century which is the only true church that can survive the gates of hell. It is my plea that you should see the need, after reading through this tract, to become a member of God’s saving church where His manifold wisdom is made known.

Identifying The True Church

Is it possible to identify the true church in this world of increasing denominationalism? Yes, if we can allow only the

Bible to be our guide. Then, how can one know which is the church of the Bible? We must go back to the Bible to obtain the identification marks of the first century church and compare them with the existing churches around the world today.

Naturally, for instance, if Mr. Awajiokino is missing, the only way his parents can locate him is to gather his marks of identification and then begin to search. It is only after finding the one that matches every mark of identification used in the search that the parents would accept him as the one they were seeking.

Therefore, when one wants to locate the true church that saves, one needs to gather its identification marks.

What are the identification marks?

Where are they found?

The Bible has the answer.

Its Builder

In Matthew 16:18, Jesus promised to build the church, “and on this rock I will build My church.” This indicates that no church can be the spiritual church unless it was founded by Jesus Christ. Therefore, any church founded by someone other than Christ is an apostate church. Many centuries before the promise Jesus made to establish the church, David announced a great truth when he said, “Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it” (Psalm 127:1).

The “house of God” is shown in the New Testament to be “the church of the living God” (I Timothy 3:15). In Matthew 15:13 Jesus declared openly that “every plant which my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted.” This teaches that it is not scriptural for a man to be a member of any spiritual household, religious plant or church, which was organized by anyone except Christ – “It shall be uprooted.”

Place of Establishment

The true church of the Bible was established at **Jerusalem**. If you are a member of a church that was not first begun at Jerusalem, you are not a member of God’s saving family on earth.

In Isaiah 2:2-3 we have a prophecy that Jehovah’s house was to be established in Jerusalem. Jehovah’s house would be exalted

and all nations would flow into it; and, the time of fulfillment would be in the “latter days.” What does *Jehovah’s house* mean? Paul, the Apostle of Christ, speaks of “the house of God, which is the church of the living God...” (I Timothy 3:15). Therefore, Jehovah’s house in the book of Isaiah is the church, and, from this prophecy, we learn “when” and “where” it was to be established.

In Micah 4:1-2 and Zechariah 1:16 it was also prophesied that the Lord’s house would be established in Jerusalem. These prophets have, through the Holy Spirit, alerted the world on “where” the spiritual body of Jesus Christ, the church, would first be established. These prophecies were fulfilled thus:

1. The Holy Spirit was not to come until Jesus had gone away (John 16:7); and, the apostles saw Him ascend out of their sight (Acts 1:9).
2. The apostles were commanded to tarry in Jerusalem (Luke 24:49); and, the apostles, after His ascension, returned to Jerusalem, the appointed place (Acts 1:12).
3. The apostles were to be clothed with “power from on high” (Luke 24:49). This happened on the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1-4).
4. The Word of the Lord was to go forth from Jerusalem in the latter days (Isaiah 2:2-3; Micah 4:1-2). And, on Pentecost Day, a stirring sermon was preached in Jerusalem (Acts 2:14-42). Peter, in his preaching, quoted Joel 12:28-32 and declared this day was the “latter days.”
5. Repentance and remission of sins started in Jerusalem (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:4, 8, 12, 19; 2:5, 14, 38, 41).
6. The Lord’s house, *the church* was to be established in Jerusalem in the “latter days” (Isaiah 2:2-3; Micah 4:12; Zechariah 1:16). This prophecy came to pass at Jerusalem with the baptism of three thousand souls (Acts 2:41).

Dear friend, you need to be a member of this same church. There is no importance in church succession. But if the same seed of the kingdom that produced the church of the first century is sown today, it will reproduce the true church in any community. Is that what you are doing?

Time A.D. 33

The church was founded on the first **Pentecost** following the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. If you are a member of any church not built on the Pentecost day of A.D. 33, then you are not in the church of the Bible, and therefore should seek union with the body of Christ. This date is based on the account of Acts 2.

It is a great privilege to be a member of the church that Christ established and of which He is the foundation (I Corinthians 3:11). Notice that the first apostate church started many centuries after the establishment of Christ’s church.

Its Designations

The true church has **no special name** but it is spoken of in several significant applications. A critical survey of the Bible reveals the following designations were authorized by the Holy Spirit for the church:

1. The body of Christ (Colossians 1:18, 24; Ephesians 4:12; 1:22-23);
2. The kingdom of God’s dear Son (Colossians 1:13);
3. The house of God (I Timothy 3:15);
4. The church of God (I Corinthians 1:2);
5. The church of the firstborn (Hebrews 12:23);
6. The church of the Lord (Acts 20:28);
7. The household of faith (Galatians 6:10);
8. The kingdom of God (Acts 28:23, 31); and
9. The churches of Christ (Romans 16:16; Matthew 16:18).

Notice that these references are not denominational names with their headquarters somewhere on earth. They do not refer to different churches established by men, but only to God’s one true church. In each of these names one can see God and His Son’s name being glorified. God has chosen these names for His church. Any term which is not from the Bible is not a scriptural name for the true church.

Beloved, if we are professing Christianity with a name or designation that is foreign to the Bible, we are dishonoring God, Christ and the Bible.

Names For Its Members

Members of the true church wore the name “Christian” (Acts 11:26). King Agrippa knew of this name (Acts 26:28). The first century church was admonished not to suffer any other name than the name “Christian” (I Peter 4:16). This name was the fulfillment of the prophecy that worshipers of God would “be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord will name” (Isaiah 62:2). This would occur when the Gentiles would see the righteousness of God.

Along with this name, the Bible also recorded that members of the true church were known by several distinctive and significant names, among which are:

1. Disciples (Acts 20:7);
2. Saints (I Corinthians 1:2);
3. Beloved of God (Romans 1:7);
4. Brethren (I Corinthians 15:6);
5. Sons of God (Romans 8:14);
6. Children of God (I John 3:1);
7. Heirs of God (Romans 8:7);
8. A Royal priesthood / priests (I Peter 2:9).

Members of the church were not called Baptists, Methodists, Anglicans, Catholics, Lutherans, Pentecostals, Jehovah’s Witnesses or any other religious hyphenated names. The Bible declares, “nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Its Head

Paul, in his writings, depicts Christ as the redeemer, the creator, and the head of the church (Colossians 1:14-18; Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:15; 5:23; Colossians 2:10). Christ is the source of life to the church. He rules the church with divine authority.

These quotations suggest that Christ has:

1. A divine head (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22-23)
2. A divine body (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22-23)
3. A divine authority (Matthew 28:18)

4. A divine practice (Colossians 3:17; I Thessalonians 5:21)
5. A divine perpetuity (Hebrews 13:8)
6. A divine relationship with the church (I Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 4:11-15; I Peter 4:8-11).

Therefore, if one has developed the desire to have Christ as his head, he must be in the body / church of which Christ is the head and the Savior.

Only One True Church

The Scripture states that “there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling” (Ephesians 4:4). This indicates that the body is one and that God loves oneness. But what does the Bible say is the body? Colossians 1:18 and Ephesians 1:22-23 are proofs that *the church* and *the body* are the same.

Therefore, if there is one body and it is the church, then there is but one true church. God does not have pleasure in denominationalism in that He does not give any man the power to duplicate churches in the name of Christianity (John 17:20-21).

The existence of denominations on earth today is the result of our inability to stay in the doctrine of Christ and to recognize Him as the only head of the church.

Membership Requirements

Men were not called members of the New Testament church by a decision to “join it” in a crusade or by filling out a form. They were not known as members because their parents were prominent members of the church. The Scripture, the standard of authority, has provided some conditions for an alien sinner who wants to become a Christian. Notice that to become a member of the Lord’s church is to become a Christian.

The conditions are:

1. Believe in Christ (John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6);
2. Repent of your sins (Acts 17:30-31; Luke 13:3-5);
3. Confess your faith in Christ Jesus as the Son of the living God (Romans 10:9-10). Confession of sin is only for those who fall away from the faith (I John 1:7-9) and not for alien sinners, and finally;

4. Be baptized into Christ (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16).

The purposes of baptism are:

1. To wash away sins (Acts 22:16).
2. For the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).
3. To enter into the one body, the true church (Acts 2:47; I Corinthians 12:13).
4. To become a member of God's kingdom (John 3:3-5).
5. To be saved (Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21).
6. To put on Christ (Galatians 3:27).

Baptism is not *pouring* or *sprinkling* as it is being practiced by some denominations. It is a figure of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6:3-6). Its action is immersion (Acts 8:38-39). Baptism does not require examination or official aptitude tests whereby if one fails he may be restricted from it. Finally, an infant is not a subject for baptism.

Its Worship

All religious services in the first century were commanded to be done in spirit and in truth (John 4:24) and also to be decent and in order (I Corinthians 14:40). The first century church met for worship on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 16:2) and their worship was simple and based entirely on the command of the Holy Spirit.

The Bible reveals only five items of worship. They are:

SINGING (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12). This was done without the use of mechanical instruments. The fact that David commanded the use of instrumental music in Jewish worship (Psalm 150) does not indicate that Christians can do so today. The Bible specifically states that we are not under the Old Testament Laws (Hebrews 1:1-2; 8:6-9; Galatians 3:24-25; Colossians 2:14-15). The first century church did not have choristers to sing for them or any type of "mood music" to entertain the saints. Moreover, the Greek word which is translated *sing* in the English Bible does not mean to "play an instrument." Therefore, instrumental music in worship today is rebellion against God's will concerning Christian worship.

PRAYING: The only way man can talk to God is by praying.

The Bible states that the early Christians were commanded to pray everywhere (I Timothy 2:8), without ceasing (I Thessalonians 5:17) and in every situation (Acts 12:5; 16:25; Romans 8:26). The denominational practice that permits a woman to lead prayers in church (where both men and women are present) is against the command of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 14:34; I Timothy 2:8).

TEACHING / PREACHING: It is God's will that Christians should study His written word so that they would not go away from the doctrines of Christ (II John 9-11). The following quotations point out that teaching or preaching was important and was a practice in the church of the first century (Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 14:23-26; Romans 1:15; I Timothy 3:15; Acts 2:42). Christians were commanded to study to show themselves approved as workmen that needed not to be ashamed (II Timothy 2:15) so they would be able to give an answer to questions concerning their faith (I Peter 3:15). In I Timothy 2:11-12 and I Corinthians 14:34-35, the Scripture commanded that women should not teach or preach but to learn in silence with all subjection. However, women can teach children and other women (Titus 2:3-5), and also men in private situations (Acts 18:26). This is the command of God to those who are spiritually gifted (I Corinthians 14:37). Violation of it means we are children of disobedience.

LORD'S SUPPER: Before the death of Christ, He instituted a feast and commanded the apostles to observe it as a memorial of His death till He would come again (Matthew 26:26-29; Luke 22:13-21). Then, the apostles commanded the church to do it as the Lord instituted (I Corinthians 11:23). This was a weekly feast in the first century (Acts 20:7) and was meant to be done on no other day than the first day of the week. Nowhere in the Bible do we read of monthly, quarterly, or yearly communion services. The early Christians partook of the "unleavened bread" and the "fruit of the vine" regularly on **every** first day of the week. They also observed this feast in a worthily manner (I Corinthians 11:27-28). All Christians are qualified to eat with Christ (I Corinthians 11:23-36).

GIVING: Collections of the Saints is an act of worship. By this collection of their individual means, the early Christians

supported their ordained missions. The apostle Paul commanded it should be done on the first day of the week (I Corinthians 16:1-2). There was no tithing, class fee, seed faith box or New Year offering in the original church. They gave as they were prospered and purposed in their hearts (II Corinthians 9:6-7). God is seeing our individual giving and will share His blessing accordingly. The examples of God-approved givers are the Macedonians who gave beyond their power (II Corinthians 8:1-4) and the poor widow of Mark 12:41-44 who gave all she had. The Bible says that “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

Its Mission

The mission of the church is three-fold. The church of the first century *preached the gospel* (Mark 16:15; I Thessalonians 1:8; Philippians 4:14-18), *helped those in need* (Acts 4:34-35; 6:1-7; I Timothy 5:16) and *edified its members* (Ephesians 4:11-16). Any church that does not have these as its mission is not the church of the Bible.

Its Doctrine

The doctrine (teaching) of the original church is based on the Bible only (alone). The early Christians accepted the revelations from the Holy Spirit without addition, subtraction or substitution (Revelation 22:18-19; Galatians 1:6-11). A sensible motto rightly states: “If a human creed contains more than the Bible it contains too much. If it contains less than the Bible it contains too little, if it contains the same thing as the Bible, we do not need it anyway.” Therefore, catechisms, church manuals, confessions of faith, denominational disciplines and ordinances, etc. are not needed today because they are works of uninspired men. The early Christians did not have them in their worship as they knew such would change the doctrines of Christ. The New Testament was their guide!

It’s Organization

The early church had reverently recognized *Christ* as its head (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 5:23; 20:17-18). Each congregation was under its *elders* (Acts 14:23; 20:17-18) who were assisted in their work by *deacons* (I Timothy 3:1-13); Philippians 1:1). It also

had *evangelists* who publicly proclaimed the gospel (II Timothy 4:5; Ephesians 4:11). The organizational structure of the early church was according to God’s command. The Lord’s church has no earthly head or headquarters and neither did it have national or international man-made organizations. Every local congregation was independent and had every right to exist without the oversight of an older or larger congregation.

The present practice of “one elder” or “single pastor” over God’s church is unscriptural. The Bible says, “appoint elders in every city” – not “one elder” (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). There must be a plurality of elders (who are the same as bishops, pastors, overseers) in every church. These names were used interchangeably (Acts 20:17, 28; I Peter 5:1-2).

It was a departure from God’s pattern that gave rise to synods, general councils, assemblies, conferences, presbyteries, etc. in the religious world. This is the result of a full-grown apostasy from the New Testament pattern of government and organization. Also, religious titles of all kinds are not according to the scriptures (Matthew 23:9-10).

It is not wise in a religious sense to call a man by the title: Reverend, Father, Apostle, Prophet, Master, Pope, Cardinal, Archbishop, Archdeacon, Pastor, etc. (Matthew 23:8-10.) Terms like elder, deacon, evangelist are scriptural, but cannot be used as a title.

The True Church Was Un-denominational

The church of the Bible was never a denomination. The word *denomination* means a division by name which also, in a religious sense, signifies a sect or party.

The original church was not a division of any other church. It was not a Jewish synagogue as the Old Testament had been fulfilled and done away before the church was established (Romans 7:1-4; Colossians 2:14-17; Hebrews 8:8-13). It was not a protestant denomination, because all denominations of our day were established by men hundreds of years after A.D. 33 (Mark 9:1; Acts 1:8; 2:1-4, 47). The practices such as prayer altars, voting on baptismal candidates, mechanical instruments of music in worship, universal and territorial organizations, etc. were not in the original church.

Finally, the true church was not the Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Church did not exist in a full-grown state until A.D. 606, nearly 600 years after the true church was established. Moreover, their cardinal doctrines conflict with the doctrines of the true church.

The original church is that “one fold” mentioned in John 10:16. There is only “one body” and it is the “church of Christ” on earth. This is the body of which Christ is its head (Ephesians 4:4; Ephesians 5:22-23).

Church Discipline

The first century Christians did not compromise when one of the members sinned. This was in obedience to the Holy Spirit’s command to withdraw from an unruly brother (II Thessalonians 3:6). In spite of the Bible record that God is a God of love (I John 4:8), He is also a God of severity (Romans 11:22).

The Lord intended that the true church should exercise discipline so as to bring the erring ones to repentance before it was too late (I Corinthians 5:5). Discipline can not wreck a local congregation when practiced according to God’s instructions. It did not weaken the church in Acts 5:1-11, 14.

Therefore, as Paul would not compromise sin at Corinth (I Corinthians 5:4-5) but rebuked a tolerance of sin in that church, any congregation that overlooks discipline today is not the true church and cannot lead one to heaven.

The Holy Spirit warns that sin should be publicly rebuked (I Timothy 5:20). There was no “back-bench” and suspension system of discipline in the true church.

Beloved, the above mentioned marks of identification were taken from a concise study of the Bible and not from a biased mind. You are sincerely requested to compare these with that of the church you are attending or other churches around you. If they do not agree with the doctrines (teachings) of the church you attend, then you have ample opportunity now to fight for your salvation by leaving your traditions behind and taking the Bible as your guide and only standard of authority in religion. You need to become a member of the body where salvation is possible. God loves you and needs you in His Family, the church of Christ, which is God’s kingdom on earth (John 3:16; II Peter 3:9).

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IS...

- The eternal purpose of God – Ephesians 3:10-11
- The fulfillment of prophecy – Acts 2:16; 17:2-3; Romans 16:25-26
- The called out – John 15:19; Matthew 16:18; Colossians 1:13
- The body of Christ – Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18
- The bride of Christ – Revelation 21:2,9; Revelation 22:17
- The kingdom of Christ – Matthew 16:18-19; Colossians 1:13
- The church of Christ – Romans 16:16
- The church and kingdom of God – I Corinthians 1:2; Acts 28:23
- The house of God, his church – I Timothy 3:15; I Corinthians 1:2
- The church of the firstborn – Hebrews 12:23
- The household of faith – Galatians 6:10
- The pillar and ground of the truth – 1 Timothy 3:15
- That which brings glory to God – Ephesians 3:21
- Where the saved are found – Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:41, 47
- The oldest church in the world – Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:38,41,47

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IS NOT...

- A denomination – Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 4:4-5; Col. 1:18
- Man-made – Matt. 16:18; Acts 2:47; 1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 5:23
- A cult – Matthew 11:28-30; Luke 6:47-49
- Of this world – John 18:36; John 15:18-19; Romans 12:2
- Seeking to please men – Gal.1:9-10; Acts 4:20; 5:29; John 6:66-67
- Popular – John 15:18-19; John 14:6; Matthew 7:13-14; Luke 6:46
- Dead – Heb.4:12; Mark 16:15; 1 Tim.3:15; Rom.6:11; 1 Cor. 15:58
- Optional – Heb. 10:24-26; Eph. 5:23; Rev. 21:2,9; Acts 2:41,47
- A social club for entertainment and fun – Luke 19:10; Luke 5:32; Romans 12:1-2; John 15:19; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; 5:17
- A business or fun-raising organization – Matthew 28:18-20; 1 Peter 2:5; Ephesians 3:21; 2 Peter 3:18
- A democracy for voting – It’s a monarchy where God is its head and authority. Acts 16:4; elders, pastors, overseers, Acts 20:28; Matthew 16:19; John 12:48; 1 Corinthians 14:37
- A place to gain riches – Acts 5; Acts 20:33; John 6:26-27; John 12:42-43; 2 Corinthians 12:14,17-18; 2 Peter 2:1-3
- Composed of perfect people – Romans 3:10,23; 1 John 1:8-10
- A newcomer to the world of churches – Acts 2; Romans 16:16

Does the Lord’s church have a place in your life?