

FIND THE CHURCH

I. FIND THE CHURCH THAT CLAIMS DISTINCTION

- A. **Colossians 1:18** *“He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.”*

Just as the head is Christ, so the body is the church.

- B. **Ephesians 4:4-6** *“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”*

1. The proper ratio of heads to bodies is 1:1. There are as many legitimate bodies as there are gods and lords and faiths, which is One. If the church is the body and there is only one body, then there must be only one church. If you are comparing churches and they lay no claim to distinction, they cannot possibly be the Lord's one true church. If they approve, explicitly or implicitly, of many, most, or all the denominations established by men, they cannot possibly be the Lord's one true church.

2. The members of this one body are obliged to be members of a local congregation wherein the work and worship is done.

- C. **Matthew 16:18** *“On this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”*

Jesus stated plainly that He would build His church. That is the only one anybody needs.

- D. **1st Thessalonians 5:21** *“Test all things; hold fast what is good.”*

The mere claim of distinction is only a starting point; the claim itself must be proven.

II. FIND THE CHURCH THAT TEACHES THE FULL GOSPEL PLAN OF SALVATION

- A. **1st Corinthians 15:1-5a** *“Brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you — unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen...”*

The fundamental tenets of the gospel are:

1. Christ died for our sins
2. He was buried
3. He rose again the third day
4. He was seen alive after death

Jesus did His part.

- B. **Acts 2:36-47** *“Let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.’ Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’ Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.’ And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation.’ Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house*

to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved."

When the gospel was preached for the first time after Jesus died, Peter convicted his hearers of sin (36) and told them to repent and be baptized (38). They did what he said (41), and the Lord added saved people to the church (47). Churches that teach salvation in Christ without convicting sinners or without emphasizing repentance and baptism, or the fact that the Lord adds the saved to His church, are overlooking the most elementary facts of salvation. This example is full of relevant information, but there is more said in Scripture about being saved:

1. **Romans 10:17** *"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."*

One must first hear the gospel before any belief in Christ can occur. It is a taught and learned religion.

2. **Romans 10:9-10** *"If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."*

What is believed in the heart concerning Christ must be confessed with the mouth for witnesses to hear. It is a religion of public proclamation, not isolation.

3. **Romans 2:4** *"Do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?"*

It is the fulfillment of God's grace and mercy that a soul repents of the sins that have severed him from God's fellowship. It is a religion that seeks distance from sin, not one which tolerates it.

4. **Romans 6:3-6** *“Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.”*

Baptism is death and burial for the old man of sin, from which one rises to new life! Any church teaching salvation before or without baptism is keeping sin alive. Any church teaching baptism after salvation is contradicting itself by burying those they think are alive.

III. FIND THE CHURCH THAT WORSHIPS LIKE THE FIRST-CENTURY CHURCH

- A. **John 4:24** *“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”*

Jesus said that acceptable worship is spiritual, meaning it is done with inward sincerity, not merely outward form. He said worship must be truthful, as opposed to false, implying it is possible to worship incorrectly.

- B. **Acts 2:42** *“They continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”*

From the outset, the church assembled and worshipped. This example is full of relevant information, but there is more said in Scripture about worship:

1. **1st Timothy 4:13, 16** *“Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine... Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.”*

Doctrine must be taught or salvation will be risked. Church is not for entertainment, but for spiritual education.

2. **Acts 20:7** *"Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight."*

The primary reason the church assembles on the first day of the week is to break bread. Other aspects of worship can and should be carried out on this day, but most of them can be done any day. Breaking bread, however, is limited to the first of the week, and it ought be done as often as there is a first day of the week, which is weekly!

1st Corinthians 10:16-17 *"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread."*

Breaking bread, which must be accompanied with the cup of blessing, refers to communion with Christ's body and blood.

3. **Acts 12:5** *"Constant prayer was offered to God... by the church."*

Christians can and should pray individually, but there is a great need for doing so collectively, as well.

4. **Colossians 3:16** *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."*

Singing is the music of the church. Not playing instruments, not clapping, not humming – just singing gratefully to the Lord and teaching others with the lyrics.

5. **1st Corinthians 16:1-2** *"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come."*

A freewill offering by members on the first day of the week is the only approved means for the church to raise funds. Scripture never mentions rummage sales, bake sales, or car washes. It never says to stand on a street corner with a coffee can to get donations from the public. God's word does not even authorize the church to take up freewill offerings on other days of the week. Collections on the first day of the week are the only fundraisers.

IV. FIND THE CHURCH THAT IS GOVERNED BIBLICALLY

- A. **Ephesians 1:22** *"He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church."*

Jesus Christ is the head over the church. No one else – no pope or president or anybody – can rightly claim that authority.

- B. **Ephesians 2:19-22** *"Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit."*

The apostles and prophets, though no longer present on earth, remain integral to the church's foundation. Their authority persists through their writings.

- C. **Titus 1:5-9** *"For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you — if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been*

taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict."

At the local level, there need to be elders who meet certain requirements whose duty it is to keep the church sound in doctrine. Until there are qualified men appointed, the church remains in a state of lack.

1. **Acts 14:23** *"So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed."*

Specifically, each church is to have a plurality of elders.

2. **Acts 20:17, 28** *"From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church... Therefore take heed to yourselves and to 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."*

The "elders" are called "overseers" ("bishops" in certain translations) whose duty it is to "shepherd the church" (same as "pastor"). These terms are used interchangeably (1st Peter 5:1-2) in Scripture despite denominations treating them as distinct offices.

- D. **Philippians 1:1** *"Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons."*

Beside the "bishops" (AKA "overseers"), there ought to be "deacons" (from a Greek word which literally translates as "servants"). These men do not lead the congregation as that is the role of the overseers/elders/pastors. Rather, they serve the church under the oversight of those men. To fill this office, one must be qualified (1st Timothy 3:8-13).

V. FIND THE CHURCH THAT PURSUES HOLINESS

- A. **1st Thessalonians 4:7** *"God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness."*

The world may scoff at strict morality, but Christians see this as our calling from God.

1. **Galatians 5:19-26** *"Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another."*

The "works" of the flesh are plural; each work is fleshly and can bring about exclusion from God's kingdom. The "fruit" of the Spirit is singular; each quality listed is part of a whole, and every single one is needed in combination with the rest to be spiritual.

2. **Ephesians 5:8-14** *"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. Therefore He says: 'Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.'"*

What Christians used to be must contrast sharply with what we become in the Light.

- B. **James 5:19-20** *"Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins."*

Church members look after one another to correct straying. This is a salvation issue.

1. **James 5:16** *"Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."*

Sins are confessed and prayers are raised on behalf of the wayward.

2. **1st Corinthians 5:11** *"I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner — not even to eat with such a person."*

Christians who persist in sin, declining repentance, must be deliberately avoided by the church.

3. **2nd Corinthians 2:6-8** *"This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him."*

When the church's withdrawal of the wayward achieves its goal, the repenting Christian must be received with comfort and love.