

## Identifying The Lord's Church #2

**Introduction.** There are many religious bodies today, but the prayer of Jesus is a prayer for unity based on truth that makes us free (John 8:32; 17:20-21; 1 Corinthians 1:10). I have even seen churches with the motto, "Agree to disagree, unite to serve." But we cannot have unity in diversity. We can only have unity by having the same mind (Philippians 2:2; 3:16).

We are not on a hunt for a church "close to" or "almost like" the New Testament church. To have Heaven's approval, Christians have to conform to those particular qualities that characterized the church as it functioned under the guidance of its inspired leaders. With this in mind, the last four characteristics will be examined tonight.

### ***I. It Must Incorporate The Proper Law***

- A. The law of the United States is our Constitution. But the law governing the church is the word of God (Acts 2:42; Romans 1:16-17; Galatians 1:6-9; Philippians 1:27; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).
- B. The Confession of Faith, the Articles of Religion, the Book of Mormon, the Qur'an, or other assorted disciplines, church manuals, or creeds are wrong laws.

### ***II. It Must Support The Proper Organization***

- A. The Lord's church is overseen via elders (Acts 14:23; 20:17, 28; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9) with deacons aiding the physical work (Acts 6:1-7; 1 Timothy 3:8-13).
- B. In the New Testament, elders as referred to as "pastors", not the preacher (Ephesians 4:11). The work they did was shepherding or pastoring (1 Peter 5:2). Paul never called himself a "pastor", but did call himself a "preacher" and "minister" (Ephesians 3:7; Colossians 1:25; 1 Timothy 2:7; 2 Timothy 1:11).
- C. The first century did not have a bishop who presided over a number of churches. There was no cardinal over churches of the various nations. There was no Papa or Pope of all churches in Bible times. There were no presidents, boards of directors, conferences, etc., in the Bible. Rather, congregations were organized on a local level, with a plurality of elders, who guided them in matters of human judgment (Hebrews 13:17).
- D. Likewise, all the work given to the church to perform was performed by the church. There were no physical organizations or groups in the first century needed to perform any of the work assigned to the church. The work that was assigned included teaching the lost (2 Thessalonians 3:1), strengthening the saints (Acts 11:22-23), and helping poor Christians (Acts 4:32-35).

### ***III. It Must Encourage The Proper Worship***

- A. Disciples engaged in prayer (Acts 2:42), singing (Ephesians 5:19), partaking of the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7), studying the scriptures (Acts 20:7), and contributing of their means (1 Corinthians 16:1-2).
- B. In the centuries following, doctrines such as holy water, penance, mass, extreme unction (last rites), purgatory, instrumental music, transubstantiation, indulgences, and auricular confession were integrated as elements of worship.

- C. Now, activities such as partaking of the Lord's Supper once a month, lessons with little biblical content, entertainment and recreational activities, and raising money by car washes and yard sales are still completely foreign to the Bible.

#### ***IV. It Must Allow The Proper Terms Of Entrance***

- A. Once one has manifested faith (John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6), repentance (Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30), confession of Jesus as the Son of God (Matthew 10:32; Romans 10:10), and been baptized for their sins (Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21), God says they are added to the church (Acts 2:47).
- B. If this is so, then one cannot "join" a church or be "voted" into it. One cannot be saved by being sprinkled as a child. Likewise, one cannot become a member of the Lord's church by simply having faith, repenting, being baptized, or confessing the name of Jesus without doing all the others.

**Conclusion.** I know what kind of vehicle I own. If I were to park at Walmart and walk into the parking lot to see a different truck, I would not make a mistake and get in the wrong truck. The same can be said of the Lord's church. It has a peculiar founder, name, organization, mission, etc.

As soon as you have reached a firm conviction about your spiritual state, and have an understanding about what the scriptures teach, do not hesitate — obey the truth. You can then know that you are a genuine Christian. You will be a member of the church that is found in the New Testament — one that cannot be wrong, because it has the divinely-prescribed identifying traits.