

Identifying Jesus' Church...

(by Bob Pulliam)

If there is only one of the Lord's church, and it is very distinct, surely we would be able to identify it. The concept of identifying the church depends on several factors:

That it exists; which is to be seen by applying this lesson, and the following lessons.
That there is a reliable description with which to identify it; which there is.
That one truly wishes to find the original; which is up to you!

The Criteria for Identifying Jesus' Church...

Jesus said He would build His church (Mt 16:18), and that it would be built upon the truth of His identity (the rock of truth which Peter had just confessed). Only one was to be built... We know that such was accomplished as we read the book of Acts. Can't we look at what was built and determine what Jesus wants the church to be? After all, the New Testament isn't exactly silent on the subject of the church!

Determinations for what the church was to do and be came by inspiration. Jesus was the chief cornerstone, and the apostles and prophets were the foundation (Eph 2:20ff). This does not mean that their opinions were the basis for the doctrines which framed the church. The church exhibits the wisdom of God from eternity (Eph 3:10). The true foundation of the church is Jesus Christ alone (I cor 3:10f). The place of the apostles and prophets was that of revelation. They made known the mind of God concerning these things which had formerly been a mystery (Eph 3:1-5), but were now revealed.

Added to the divine origin of the church, is the fact that deviations from the original pattern were condemned by inspired men. The Corinthian church is an excellent example of this:

"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles; that a man has his father's wife! And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed." (I Cor 5:1ff)

"Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you." (I Cor 11:17ff)

"Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" (I Cor 15:12)

Warnings were given of individuals who would come teaching false doctrines (I Tim 4:1-3). We know from history that false doctrines are the foundations of denominations (note the mention of forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats). Jesus said that worship can only be accomplished God's way, otherwise vain (Mt 15:8f)! John wrote that we must abide in the doctrine of Christ (II Jn 9f). Jesus revealed that when churches begin to depart, there comes a time when they are removed from God's presence (Rev 2 & 3, esp. 2:5).

No Tolerance Factor for Error...

How wrong can we be in restoring the church that Jesus built? Can we decide not to adhere to God's will in one area, while following in all others. How many areas can we deviate in?... This question would make obedience a percentage calculation for salvation. When you make a deposit at your bank, how many of the digits in the account number do you want the teller to get right? Would your funds get into the right account if the teller entered all of the digits correctly, except one? The account number has a distinct pattern of digits that must match for utilization. The church has a distinct pattern that must be followed to please God... Am I certain that this is so? Read again the warnings and examples of error in the passages above. God really does expect us to follow His word as He gave it! Imagine that! He meant what He said! Is that really so novel an idea?

A Pattern to be Followed, and With Which to Compare...

In the next few lessons, we will be looking at several different aspects of the church which actually form a pattern. One might say that denominationalism attempts to put a square peg in a round hole. The circle (round hole) has no corners into which the square can fit; they have different shapes, thus different patterns. The church of Jesus Christ has a very distinct pattern that we can follow in duplicating, or use to compare to claimants of original standing.

The validity of a binding pattern is seen in the knowledge that the first century church was pleasing to God, as revealed by the inspired apostles and prophets. Knowing that what is in the Bible is pleasing to God, we should follow it that we also might be pleasing. Not following the pattern revealed in the New Testament dooms our efforts to failure.

This pattern is seen in several aspects of her being:

- Her name... such should reflect the preference and ownership of her builder (lesson 10).
- Her doctrine... such should be based on the inspired doctrine of the first century (lesson 11).
- Her purity... such should be fitting with the holiness of the one who built her (lesson 12).
- Her worship... such should be in accordance with the truth revealed in scriptures (lesson 13).
- Her organization... such should follow the pattern seen in the first century church (lesson 14 & 15).
- Her work... such should confine itself to the work performed by the early church (lesson 16 & 17).

Conclusion...

There is a distinct criteria for what the church is to be and do: The New Testament. In the New Testament we find inspired men interacting with the church to:

- Command ways that were necessary.
- Record examples that were divinely approved.
- Condemn errors and correct them.

With this information, we have a pattern which can be followed to have Jesus' church today. It doesn't take a religious scholar to understand these things. The Bible was not written to

religious scholars. It was written to everyday people like you and me! What one really needs to understand the truth is a "good and honest heart" (Lk 8:15).