

Identifying Christ's Church

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Jesus prayed for unity that the world would believe. "THAT THEY ALL MAY BE ONE; AS THOU, FATHER, ART IN ME, AND I IN THEE, THAT THEY ALSO MAY BE ONE IN US: THAT THE WORLD MAY BELIEVE THAT THOU HAST SENT ME" (**John 17:21**). Yet, as one looks at the religious world, no one could accuse it of being one when there are over a thousand religious groups all claiming to be of Christ. However, Christ established just one. "THERE IS ONE BODY, AND ONE SPIRIT, EVEN AS YE ARE CALLED IN ONE HOPE OF YOUR CALLING" (**Ephesians 4:4**). Paul also teaches that one body is the church (**Ephesians 1:22-23**).

How in the world, then, could a person come to know which one, out of the thousand plus, is the one Christ established? The answer is, the same way one would identify a person he does not know. There are certain identifying marks or characteristics that will set the one church the Lord built apart from all others.

There will be certain traits that all will have. When one identifies a person, there are characteristics that just about all people possess. Just about all people have two eyes, ears, arms, hands, legs, and feet, and a nose and mouth. If we stopped with just those characteristics in trying to identify one certain person as opposed to a thousand others, we would be unsuccessful. There are some traits that will set us apart from others: color of hair, eyes, and skin. These traits begin limiting the choices. Then there are those traits that narrow our choices down to the one particular individual we might be trying to identify: possibly scars or birthmarks, fingerprints, and name.

In trying to identify the Lord's church, there will be characteristics that are almost universal with all religious groups. There will be some characteristics that some groups have that distinguish them from others. However, for the group to be the Lord's church, we must have all the identifying marks. In trying to identify a person, we would naturally ask the person his name. Likewise, the church cannot be the Lord's church without wearing His name. While the Lord's church was never given a specific name; there are many terms used within the Bible to identify the Lord's people. The Bible uses terms that shows that the church belongs to Christ: church of Christ (**Romans 16:16**), bride of Christ (**Ephesians 5**), body of Christ (**Ephesians 4:12**), kingdom of Christ (**Colossians 1:13**), church of God (since Jesus is God; **Acts 20:28**), house of God (**1 Timothy 3:15**), kingdom of God (**John 3:3**). Certainly no group can be the church which Christ built, if it wears some name not identifying itself as being of Christ. However, simply because some group wears a correct name, does not mean that it is the one church of the Bible.

There are other essential items necessary to be the Lord's church. There must be the recognition that Jesus is the head of the church. "AND HATH PUT ALL THINGS UNDER HIS FEET, AND GAVE HIM TO BE THE HEAD OVER ALL THINGS TO THE CHURCH" (**Ephesians 1:22**). Jesus ascended to heaven after His resurrection and is ruling now in heaven (**Acts 2**). As such, there are no earthly headquarters. Any organization that has an earthly headquarters or that

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claims some person (other than Jesus) is head of the church, is not the church which the Lord built — including the Roman Catholic church with its pope as its head.

However, Jesus *did* authorize local congregations of His people. Thus, the church is spoken of in the universal sense (**Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:47**), in a geographical area (**2 Corinthians 8:1; Galatians 1:2**), and in the local sense (**Acts 14:23; 1 Corinthians 1:2**). Within the local congregation (church) God has established organization. This, of course, is necessary to provide an efficient and orderly functioning local congregation. God shows us that organization as He begins the book of Philippians. "PAUL AND TIMOTHEUS, THE SERVANTS OF JESUS CHRIST, TO ALL THE SAINTS IN CHRIST JESUS WHICH ARE AT PHILIPPI, WITH THE BISHOPS AND DEACONS" (**Philippians 1:1**). Thus, the organization within the local congregation consists of elders — also called "BISHOPS," "PASTORS," "SHEPHERDS," — deacons and all saints (members). Some would add to that list preachers (evangelists) and teachers (**Ephesians 4:11-12**). The elders of the congregation have the oversight of the congregation. They have the responsibility of seeing that things done are done right (meaning of the word "BISHOP"). They make the decisions concerning expedient matters within the local congregation. As such they must be good leaders.

There are many other areas in identifying the church Jesus built and that He will save (**Ephesians 5:23-25**). We need to identify the worship, work, plan of salvation or terms of entrance into the church, along with many other doctrinal matters. It is also important to identify the type of life it commands for its members. We encourage you in this study.