

## The churches of Christ

- A. Jesus, recognized as the sole head (Ephesians 1:22-23)
- B. Identified with the head by name (Romans 16:16)
- C. Worship in truth (John 4:24)
- D. Organized according to the New Testament pattern (Philippians 1:1)

In Romans 16:16 Paul wrote of “the churches of Christ” while in Ephesians 4:4 he taught that there is one church. How can both statements be true? Because in Ephesians, Paul is speaking of the worldwide group of the saved, while in Romans he is referring to churches which existed from city to city where Christians in that place labored together in the gospel (Corinth, Thessalonica, etc.).

Revelation 2-3 shows that over time churches that once were faithful may become fruitless and be completely disregarded by God (Rev. 2:5). It is also possible that from the beginning of a particular church, God has never been pleased. How do you know the difference between a faithful and unfaithful church? Consider four characteristics of a faithful church that are often missing from churches today—

**1. Jesus, recognized as the sole head** Any church which recognizes anyone beside Jesus Christ as the head is not a church of which Christ would approve (Ephesians 1:22-23). Churches which receive orders from popes, presidents, councils, conferences, or associations have abandoned the headship of Jesus Christ. Churches in the New Testament received their instruction from Jesus Christ through the apostles (Ephesians 2:20; 3:5). By the Scriptures, the apostles continue to teach those things which completely equip us for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17; Ephesians 3:3-5).

**2. Identified with the head by name** The way a church identifies itself, tells you something about them. “Church of Christ” (Romans 16:16) is often used by churches because it identifies them with the head of the church, Jesus Christ. There is not one single way by which a church must be identified, so you can’t assume something based on what is painted on the sign out front alone. However, any name which fails to honor the head Jesus Christ, fails to please God.

For example, what does “Lutheran Church” tell you about who is honored? Did Paul ever help establish a Lutheran church in any city? What about “Baptist Church”? Some Baptists claim this is named after John the Baptist. Borrowing Paul’s words to Corinth, John was not crucified for you, so he is not worthy of being followed (1 Cor. 1:12-13). Other Baptists say this name is related to their practice of baptism. But is baptism more important than faith or repentance? Why elevate it?

These are names and ideas that are the product of human wisdom. If a church began by going beyond the word of God in order to identify itself, what does that tell you about how they make other decisions? Not a good start. Not a sound church.

**3. Worship in truth** It seems that the most attention people give to worship is whether to attend the “traditional” or “contemporary” service, as many churches offer. In the New Testament, the apostles taught the church how to worship God in spirit and truth (John 4:24). What did they teach about worship?

\* Teaching The study of God's inspired word has always been included in worship to God. In Acts 2:42, the apostles' doctrine, or teaching, reflects this activity of those who continued steadfastly. When a church advocates error, you can be sure that God is not pleased (Revelation 2:14-16).

\* Lord's Supper In Acts 2:42 this is called "breaking bread." In 1 Corinthians 11:20, 23-26 this involves both the bread and the cup by which we remember the death of Christ "until He comes." The disciples broke bread on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). This is the only day which is given significance for Christians, hence it must be that day which John called "the Lord's Day" (Revelation 1:10). It is odd that most churches assemble *every* Sunday and take a collection *every* Sunday but only take the Lord's Supper a few times per year. Beware!

\* Singing Sometimes the question is asked "Why don't you have music?" To the contrary, we have the same music as the church in the New Testament as they worshiped God—but what kind of music? "I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding" (1 Corinthians 14:15). We sing, just like we read the church did. And because we have no instruction from the apostles to "play" in worship to God, then we don't presume to speak for God and add it.

\* Prayer The church has always been fervent in offering prayers to God. Public prayer was an approved part of the worship in Corinth and Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 14:15; Acts 2:42).

\* Giving While some may merely view giving as "passing the plate," a proper view of giving understands it to be an expression of thanks to God as much as a song or a prayer. Due to the fact that it is to be done "on the first day of every week," we know that giving is a part of the worship which the church offers to God every week (1 Corinthians 16:2, NASB).

**4. Organized according to the New Testament pattern** Few churches pay much attention to the way that God designed churches to be organized. Many people might think this is just a detail of little significance. But is the organization that God gave to the home important? May the husband submit to the wife and the parents obey the children? Organization matters!

Philippians 1:1 shows that the church at Philippi had bishops, deacons, and saints. And Paul spent some amount of time there preaching the gospel (Acts 16:11-40). Qualified bishops (also called elders, pastors, and overseers) were in every church (1 Timothy 3:1; Titus 1:5; Acts 14:23). Their oversight went no further than the local church in which they were appointed to work (1 Peter 5:1-2).

The organization of most modern churches is absent from scripture. Districts, dioceses, and similar multi-congregational structures are the product of human thinking. Likewise the nation or worldwide oversight of popes or presidents fails the test of Scripture. Watch!

**Conclusion** This is by no means a comprehensive list but points to Biblical matters that are often neglected or ignored in churches today.

As was mentioned above, the name on a sign alone does not indicate the faithfulness of that group, though that may inform you of many things. This article is not intended to represent the teaching of any other congregation. It is written to inform you of what the "churches of Christ" (Romans 16:16) recorded in Scripture were involved in and what we at the church of Christ in Quail Valley teach and practice. Test all things (1 John 4:1).