

## Identifying the New Testament Church

Allan McNabb

Below is a checklist based upon New Testament Scripture in respect to the church. Certainly, this brief list cannot be exhaustive but is helpful in identifying the New Testament church as opposed to the denominations of men.

Compare the church you attend, or any church, to the following checklist. And, compare this checklist to the Bible. Answer yes or no to each of the following questions. Any church that does not have the components listed below is not a New Testament church founded upon Christ, but it is a man-made organization founded upon men.

**Is Christ the Head of the church?** "For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church" (Eph. 5:23). If Christ is head of the church, the church must be structured as He has ordained. In order for the church to be structured by Christ, it must be structured according to the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9). Everything done by the church must be authorized by Christ, wherefore; authority for every doctrine and practice in the church must be found in the Bible. And, everything that is found in the Scriptures relative to the church must be accomplished by the church.

**Does the church bear a Scriptural name?** Some of the most common names in the Bible for a New Testament church are: church of the Firstborn (Heb. 12:23), church of God (Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 1:2; 10:32; 1 Tim. 3:5), the church (1 Th. 1:1; Eph. 5:23), church of Christ (Rom. 16:16), house of God (1 Tim. 3:15). A church with any other name is not a church founded upon the doctrine of Christ but upon the doctrines of men.

**Is the church organized according to scripture?** God teaches, in the Bible, that churches are to be locally organized with elders (also called Bishops), deacons, evangelists, teachers, and members (saints); and that each church is autonomous (Eph. 4:11; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:5; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; Heb. 5:12). Churches that have appointed qualified men to be elders and deacons must be ruled with a plurality (more than one) of elders. The men who are appointed must meet qualifications as outlined in the New Testament. A church that is organized with any other administrative offices is not a church organized according to the doctrine of Christ, but it is organized according to the doctrines of men. By definition, a denomination is "a religious organization uniting in a single legal and administrative body a number of local congregations" (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary); therefore, a denomination is not organized according to the doctrine of Christ.

**Does the church Scripturally worship God?** The Bible teaches New Testament worship to contain: prayer (Acts 2:42; 4:24); singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs - instrumental accompaniment is excluded by silence of the Scriptures (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16); observing the Lord's Supper every first day of the week (Acts 2:42; 20:7); laying by in store (collection) as prospered every first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:1-2); teaching and preaching (Acts 2:42; 20:7-12). A church that "takes from" or "adds to" the worship of Christ's church is not worshiping according to the divine plan of Christ. One does not worship God unless his worship is according to the doctrine of Christ and thus worships in spirit and truth (Jn. 4:24).

**Is the church benevolent according to Scriptural design?** The church may disburse monetary benevolence from the treasury to the elders of another church (Acts 11:30). Benevolence may be disbursed from the church treasury to an individual Christian, but benevolence disbursed on the grounds of widowhood must meet the criteria ordained by the apostle Paul (1 Tim. 5:3-16). Benevolence to those outside the church is commanded to be disbursed on a personal basis. The church cannot take funds from the treasury to aid the general public (Gal. 6:6-10; James 1:27). Funds in the treasury have been collected "for the saints" (1 Cor. 16:1-2) and are to be used in "ministering to the saints" (2 Cor. 9:1).

**Is the method of financially supporting evangelists and missionaries Scriptural?** Missionaries, such as Paul, received financial support direct from individuals and churches. They did not receive financial support from a missionary society or sponsoring church that collected financial funds from a group of churches (Phil. 4:10-20) thus abrogating local church authority and responsibility.

**Do church members socially fellowship according to the doctrine of Christ?** Some groups build and financially support social halls and activities from the church treasury. In the Bible, the church treasury was never used to support social activities. But, social fellowship was a personal responsibility discharged "from house to house" (Acts 2:46). The church cannot make the worship of the church a social activity thus profaning worship to God (1 Cor. 11:17-22). Wholesome social fellowship is good in the sight of God, but we cannot rob God to pay for our social facilities and activities.

**Does the church exclude human creeds, catechisms, church manuals, professions of faith?** Likewise, does the church exclude all other gospels of men? "... you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Tim. 3:15-17) "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed." (Gal. 1:8) If a church uses any man-made commands or traditions thereby "adding to" or "taking from" the doctrine of Christ, then it is not a church according to the doctrine of Christ. It is an organization according to the doctrines and gospels of men. The doctrine of Christ requires that only the Scriptures be used in organizing the church.

**Does the church teach salvation as revealed in the Bible (that baptism is for the remission of sins and to wash away sins)?** "Peter then 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.'" (Acts 2:38) "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." (Acts 22:16) Regarding baptism, many denominational doctrines differ from the Bible. Some teach that baptism is not essential and others teach that, while it should be observed, it is not for the remission of sins nor to wash away sins. You must decide whether to believe denominational doctrines or the doctrine of Christ.