

IDENTIFYING MARKS OF THE TRUE CHURCH

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Detective shows were all the rage when I was growing up in the 1970's. Watching a private investigator carefully look for clues and eventually solve a difficult case was interesting to me (and still is). What if a famous detective was given the task of finding the church today that matches the one described in the New Testament? He would begin by carefully examining the New Testament in order to list the identifying marks of that church. Then he would search until he found a group of people today that fit those identifying marks. This sounds simple, but it would demand careful investigation. Perhaps you are engaged in this effort right now. What identifying marks should you look for?

Head and Authority is Christ – One of the first things to look for is a church that follows only Christ as its head and His word as its only authority. Jesus was made to be head over all things to the church which is His body (Ephesians 1:22-23). No man is the head of the church, and no human board or council is the authority that determines laws to follow. Its preaching and practice must reflect only the will of Christ.

Bible as the only Creed – There were no human creeds in the New Testament church. The apostles' doctrine was preached and followed because it was the revealed will of Christ (Acts 2:42; Gal. 1:11-12). The Bible is sufficient to guide us now into all good works (2 Timothy 3:16-17). No human creed books are needed in the church of Christ.

Membership of Baptized Believers – Those who were added to the church were those who gladly received the word and were baptized (Acts 2:41, 47). All those who are baptized into Christ have been baptized into one body (Romans 6:3; 1 Corinthians 12:13). Those who believe and have been baptized are the saved who make up the one church (Mark 16:16). These baptized believers were simply called Christians (Acts 11:26).

Divine Name, Organization, and Work – The name by which the church is identified can be found among those given in the word of God (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 1:2). The organization of elders and deacons among the saints is found in churches on the local level (Philippians 1:1). There is no universal organization (pope, headquarters, council) revealed in the Bible for the church. The work God gave the church encompasses evangelism of the lost, edifying the saints, and benevolence toward needy saints (1 Thessalonians 1:8; Ephesians 4:15-16; Acts 4:34-35). Worship is rendered through partaking of the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7), singing (Colossians 3:16), praying (Acts 2:42), giving (1 Corinthians 16:1-2), and preaching/teaching (Act 2:42).