

# Recognizing a Real Church



Churches African Methodist Episcopal (AME) (14)	Churches Church of God (11)
Churches African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AME Zion) (7)	Churches Church of God in Christ (47)
Churches Apostolic (10)	Churches Church of God-Anderson, Indiana (Affiliate) (1)
Churches Assemblies of God (20)	Churches Church of God-Cleveland (2)
Churches Assemblies of God-Independent (1)	Churches Church of the Nazarene (0)
Churches Bahai Faith (1)	Churches Community (4)
Churches Baptist Bible Fellowship (1)	Churches Community of Christ (1)
Churches Baptist Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (3)	Churches Congregational (1)
Churches Baptist General (21)	Churches Covenant (2)
Churches Baptist-Independent (1)	Churches Eckhardt (1)
Churches Baptist-Missionary (9)	Churches Evangelical (5)
Churches Baptist-North American (1)	Churches Evangelical Covenant (1)
Churches Baptist-Primitive (6)	Churches Evangelists Gospel (1)
Churches Baptist-Southern (58)	Churches Free Methodist (2)
Churches Bible (22)	Churches Friends (1)
Churches Bible-Independent (2)	Churches Full Gospel (19)
Churches-Biblical (4)	Churches-Greek Orthodox (1)
Churches-Catholic (6)	Churches-Hindu (4)
Churches-Catholic-Evangelical (1)	Churches-Independent (4)
Churches-Catholic-Traditional (1)	Churches-Independent Bible (1)
Churches-Charismatic (6)	Churches-Independent-Fundamental (1)
Churches-Christian (10)	Churches-Interdenominational (12)
Churches-Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME) (0)	Churches-Jehovah's Witnesses (15)
Churches-Christian Science (2)	Churches-Jewish-Christian (3)
Churches-Christian Synopses of Christ (10)	Churches-Lutheran Church of the Lutheran Confession (1)
Churches-Christine-Independent (1)	Churches-Lutheran Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) (14)
Churches-Christine-Baptist (1)	Churches-Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS) (8)
Churches-Christ of Christ-New Testament (2)	Churches-Lutheran-Wisconsin Synod (1)

## Three Crucial Questions

- 1) What is the difference between a church & a Christian gathering?
- 2) What is the difference between a true church & a false church?
- 3) What is the difference between a weak, unhealthy, true church & a strong, healthy true church?

## A Church or a Christian Gathering?

- To Be a Church:
  - A. A Mutual Commitment to be a Church
    - Several creeds
    - The London Baptist Confession of 1689: a church consists of those who "do willingly consent...giving themselves to the Lord, and one to another, by the will of God, in professed subjection to the ordinances of the gospel."
    - The New Hampshire Confession: "a visible church is a congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in faith and fellowship of the gospel."

## A Church or a Christian Gathering?

- A. A Mutual Commitment to be a Church
- B. The Regular Participation in Corporate Worship on the Lord's Day
  - Acts 20:7 - On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight.
  - 1 Cor. 16:2 - On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.
- C. The Consistent Practice of the Ordinances

## A True Church or a False Church?

- A Brief History
  - John Wycliffe (c. 1329-1384): he renounced the Pope's claims, repudiated the Mass, and defined the church as "the assembly of all those predestined to salvation."
  - John Hus (c. 1369-1415): "two righteous persons congregated together in Christ's name constitute, with Christ as the head, a particular holy church."
  - Martin Luther: the church is the "*communio sanctorum*" (the communion of the saints)
  - RCC theologians - "protestant" groups are not the true church because they are not "one holy catholic apostolic church."
  - Reformers - examined the Scripture to define biblically what constituted a true church.
  - Eventually a consensus of two or three marks [Latin, *notae ecclesiae*] of a true church.

## The *Notae* or Marks of a True Church

- The followers of Luther proposed two:
  - The True Preaching of the Word of God
  - The Right Administration of the Ordinances
    - Augsburg Confession (1530): the church is "the congregation of saints in which the gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments rightly administered."
    - John Calvin: "wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists."
- Later Reformers added a third mark:
  - The Faithful Exercise of Church Discipline

## The *Notae* or Marks of a True Church

- The True Preaching of the Word of God
  - John 8:31 - Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine.
  - John 8:47 - "He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear *them*, because you are not of God."
  - John 14:23 - Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.
  - 2 Th. 2:15 - So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of *mouth* or by letter from us.
  - Cf. Gal. 1:8-9; 2 Tim. 3:16—4:4; 1 John 4:1-3; 2 John 9-11 [examine later]

## The *Notae* or Marks of a True Church

- The Right Administration of the Ordinances
  - Why?
    - To contrast with the Roman Catholic teaching that saving grace came through the sacraments, making them a kind of work unto salvation.
    - As a clear indication that the group had an intention to be a church.
    - As controls to membership:
      - Baptism to enter membership
      - The Lord's Table to show continuing membership
  - 1 Cor. 10:14-17, 21
  - 1 Cor. 11:23-30

## The *Notae* or Marks of a True Church

- The Faithful Exercise of Church Discipline
  - Matt. 18:15-20
  - Acts 20:28-31
  - Rom. 16:17-18a - I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.
  - 1 Cor. 5:1-5, 13 - REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES.
  - Gal. 6:1 - Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; *each one* looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.
  - Eph. 5:6, 11 - Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience... Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them,

## The *Notae* or Marks of a True Church

- The Faithful Exercise of Church Discipline
  - 2 Th. 3:14-15 - If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.
  - 1 Tim. 1:20 - Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme.
  - 1 Tim. 5:20 - Those [elders] who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of *sinning*.
  - Titus 1:10-11 - there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not *teach* for the sake of sordid gain.
  - Titus 3:10 - Reject a factious man after a first and second warning.
  - Cf. Rev. 2:14-16, 20

## The Marks of a True Church

- The True Preaching of the Word of God
- The Right Administration of the Ordinances
- The Faithful Exercise of Church Discipline

## The Dividing Line

- When does a true church become a false church?
  - When they deny the truth of the gospel.
    - 1) The Person & Work of Christ
      - 1 John 2:18-24; 4:1-6, 15; 5:1
      - 2 John 7-11
    - 2) The Means of Salvation
      - Gal. 1:6-9

## The Application

- If a church embraces a false Christ and/or a false gospel, it is a false church.
  - All the Cults
    - The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints
    - Jehovah's Witnesses
  - The Roman Catholic Church
    - The Church as a Whole
    - Individual Roman Catholic Parishes
    - Individual Roman Catholics
  - Liberal Protestant Denominations and Churches

## The Application

- If a church embraces the true Christ and the true gospel, it is a true church.
  - It may be incredibly spiritually immature (1 Cor. 3:1ff).
  - It may be a church where there is a cold, dead orthodoxy without a genuine love for Jesus Christ (Rev. 2:1-7 – Ephesus).
  - It may tolerate doctrinal error and licentious living (Rev. 2:12-17 - Pergamum).
  - It may compromise with the world (Rev. 2:18-29 - Thyatira).
  - It may be dead – that is composed primarily of unbelievers (Rev. 3:1-6 - Sardis).
  - It may differ with us doctrinally in major ways.

## The Application

- The doctrinal path to becoming a false church underscores the importance of the accurate teaching of the Word of God.
  - 1 Tim. 3:15 – “the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.”
  - 2 Tim. 3:16—4:4