
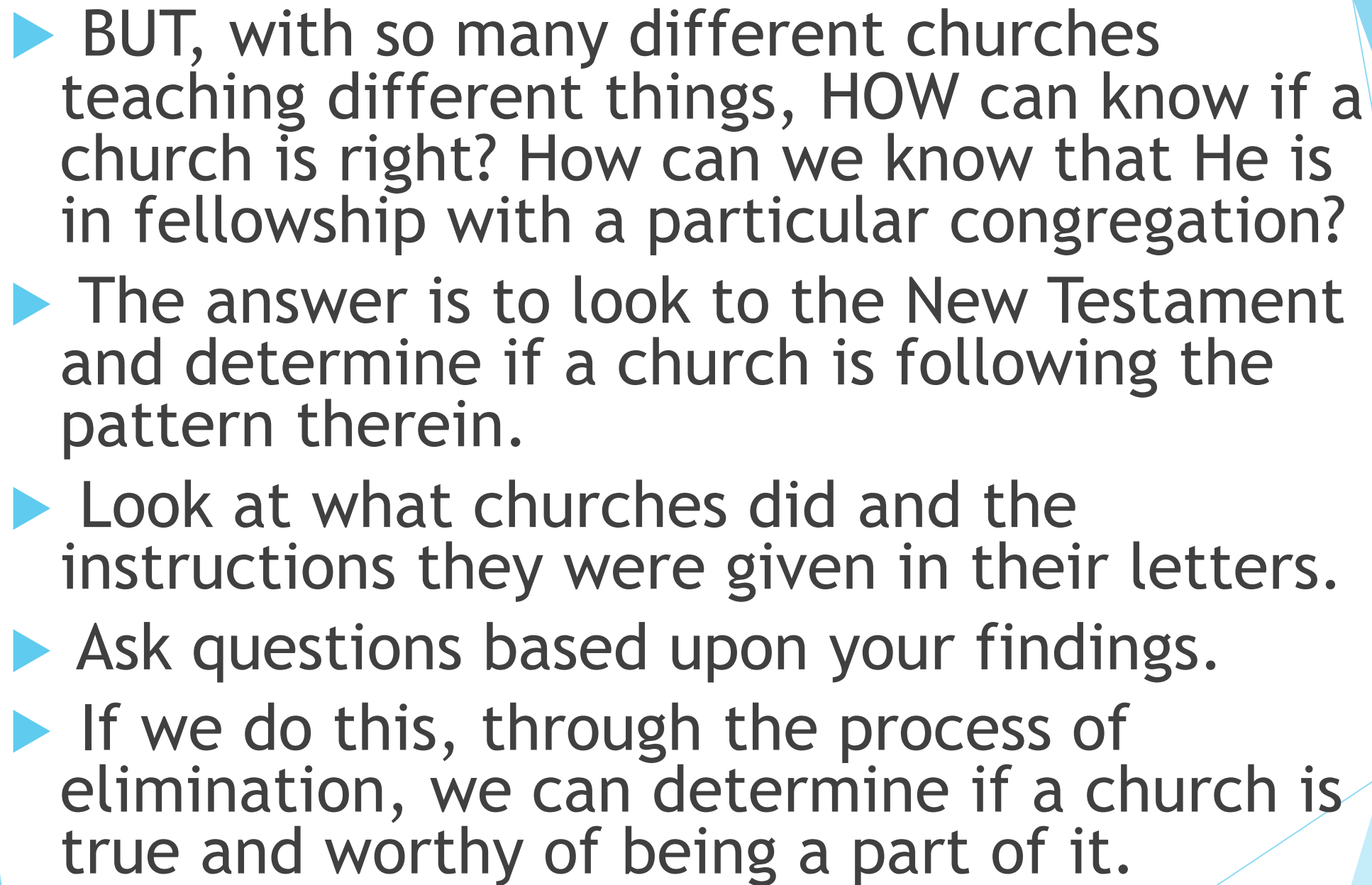


# How Can I Identify the New Testament Church?

- ▶ One way to describe a local church is as our “support system” in a world that stands contrary to God, His will and often His people.
- ▶ The truth: If we desire heaven, we need each other!
- ▶ We are described as “the body of Christ” with Christ as our head, and each part needed - **Ephesians 1:22-23, 1 Corinthians 12:12-27**

- ▶ In America alone, there are hundreds of different denominations and churches professing to be part of “the one true church” (or exclusively).
- ▶ BUT, because of conflicting teachings and organization, they cannot all be correct.
- ▶ **1 Corinthians 14:33**
- ▶ **Ephesians 3:10-11** - the church reveals God’s manifold wisdom.
- ▶ This includes the church in both its universal (all the saved) and local sense (congregation)

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- ▶ The church that Jesus built was established in the 1<sup>st</sup> century (**Matthew 16:18-19, Acts 20:28**)
  - ▶ During that time frame He ALSO authored the local church as the means for brethren to join together within a community to do prescribed work.
  - ▶ In the New Testament we find the pattern that local churches followed.
  - ▶ That pattern has NOT changed!

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- The background of the slide features abstract, overlapping geometric shapes in various shades of blue, ranging from light sky blue to deep navy blue. These shapes create a dynamic, modern look on the right side of the slide.
- ▶ BUT, with so many different churches teaching different things, HOW can know if a church is right? How can we know that He is in fellowship with a particular congregation?
  - ▶ The answer is to look to the New Testament and determine if a church is following the pattern therein.
  - ▶ Look at what churches did and the instructions they were given in their letters.
  - ▶ Ask questions based upon your findings.
  - ▶ If we do this, through the process of elimination, we can determine if a church is true and worthy of being a part of it.

In this lesson we will look at some questions that will help us answer:

**How can I identify  
the New Testament  
church?**

# Is Christ its only source of authority?

- ▶ **Matthew 28:18-20** - all authority
- ▶ **Ephesians 1:22-23** - the church is His body
- ▶ **Colossians 3:17** - do all in the name of the Lord
- ▶ While many churches profess that Christ is their ultimate authority, when you examine what they do and who they appeal to for answers, you often find the wisdom of men supersedes scripture

# What does her name say about her identity?

## Names are important

- ▶ They identify who we are
- ▶ Paul spoke of “the churches of Christ”
  - **Romans 16:16**
- ▶ Why do we call ourselves a “church of Christ”?
- ▶ Because that is who we desire to be.  
**Philippians 2:9-11**



# What does her name say about her identity?

## Names are important

- ▶ Other scriptural designations
- ▶ Church of God **1 Corinthians 1:2, 10:32**, Also **2 Cor. 1:1**
- ▶ Church of... **1 Thessalonians 1:1**,  
**cf. 2:14, 2 Thess. 1:1**

All these names are descriptive

# What does her name say about her identity?

## Names are important

- ▶ Can you find the name of a church in the Bible?
- ▶ When a church uses an unscriptural name - they are identifying something different than what is in the Bible - whether after someone or some structure or doctrine
  - Lutheran - after Martin Luther
  - Baptist - doctrine
  - Catholic - universal organization
  - Methodist - emphasizing methods
  - Episcopalian - emphasizing bishops
  - Presbyterian - governed by elders
- ▶ Denominational names, by definition, are admitting doctrinal division.

# What does her name say about her identity?

## Names are important

- ▶ How are members identified?
- ▶ **Christians – Acts 11:26**
- ▶ Other designations - Brethren, saints, disciples, children of God, priests, etc.

NOTE: A name by itself does NOT make a church true to God's word.

# How is membership considered?

- ▶ Most understand that the church universal is the body of all who are saved.
- ▶ But what relationship does a local church have to the universal church?
- ▶ A local congregation should only accept into its number those believed to be saved. We use human judgment and make flawed decisions, BUT we must respect God's plan of salvation

# How is membership considered?

Those who have obeyed the gospel

- ▶ Hear - **Romans 10:17**
- ▶ Believe - **Mark 16:16, John 3:16, Romans 10:9-10**
- ▶ Repent - **Acts 2:38, 3:19, Luke 13:3**
- ▶ Confess - **Romans 10:9-10, Acts 8:37**
- ▶ Are baptized - **Acts 2:38, Mark 16:16, Acts 22:16, 1 Peter 3:20-21, etc.**

# How is membership considered?

## Those who have obeyed the gospel

- ▶ Obeying the gospel does not end when we come up out of the water.
- ▶ We are called live faithfully
- ▶ **Revelation 2:10, 14:13, Hebrews 10:25-29**
- ▶ Christians are called upon to join the church - **cf. Acts 9:26-27**
- ▶ With the exception of temporal circumstances God expects us to join ourselves to a group of faithful believers

# Is the church scripturally organized?

## Local churches were autonomous

- ▶ Autonomous means self-governing
- ▶ Each local church was independent - No earthly headquarters, congregations overseeing other congregations, etc.
- ▶ Each congregation existed as if it were the only one on earth - **Acts 9:31, 16:4-5**
- ▶ There was cooperation - but without surrendering autonomy (i.e. concurrent - **cf. 1 Corinthians 16:1-2, 2 Corinthians 11:8**)

# Is the church scripturally organized?

## Its leadership

- ▶ Elders, deacons and saints - **Philippians 1:1**
- ▶ Elders appointed based upon a high standard -  
**1 Timothy 3:1-7, Acts 14:23**  
Their authority was limited to local rule -  
**Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:2-3**
- ▶ Deacons appointed to serve -  
**1 Tim. 3:8-13**
- ▶ Saints - all the saved



# Is the church scripturally organized?

## Many churches today:

- ▶ A study of denominations show organization foreign to scripture
  - Catholicism - Pope/Vatican council
  - JWs - “Governing Body of JWs”
  - Mormons - a presidential board, a board of 12 apostles, groups of “the seventy”
  - Episcopal church - “The General Convention”
  - Methodist church (UMC) - council of bishops
  - Baptist congregations often join “conventions”
- ▶ Many denominations establish bodies that legislate BEYOND the bounds of scripture - **1 Corinthians 4:6, 17, 14:33**

# What does she see as her work?

God has specified our work

- ▶ Biblically:
- ▶ The church teaches, evangelizes  
**1 Thessalonians 1:8**  
**Acts 13:2-3, Philippians 4:15-16**
- ▶ The church edifies - builds up its members  
**Ephesians 4:11-12, 16;**  
**1 Corinthians 14:26**

# What does she see as her work?

God has specified our work

- ▶ Biblically:
- ▶ The church helped needy saints  
**1 Timothy 5:16, Acts 6:1-6, 11:27-30**
- ▶ The church worships God -  
**1 Corinthians 11, 14**

# What does she see as her work?

## God has specified our work

- ▶ Many denominations (and congregations) do things NOT authorized for the church to do
  - social needs, political activism, entertainment, catering to “the whole man”
- ▶ This was NEVER God’s intended purpose for the church.
- ▶ If a church is involved in or emphasizing work other than what scripture teaches, it is NOT His church

# Is her worship based upon God's pattern?

## God has given us a specific pattern

- ▶ Worship in spirit and in truth -  
**John 4:24, Acts 2:42**
- ▶ 5 acts of worship -  
Singing (**Ephesians 5:19**), prayers (**1 Corinthians 14:15**), study (**Acts 2:42**), the Lord's Supper (**Acts 20:7**), Giving - (**1 Corinthians 16:1-2**)
- ▶ When considering a church - what is its focus in worship? Entertainment, large crowds, emotions driven? Or is it a desire to worship God HIS way?

# What does she expect of her members ?

To live pure and true lives

- ▶ Faithful churches will encourage participation
  - **Ephesians 4:16, 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, etc.**
- ▶ Will teach and demand moral & pure living -  
**Romans 12:1-2, Matthew 6:33-34**
- ▶ Practice discipline -  
**1 Corinthians 5:6-8, 5:9-11**
- ▶ Encourage Unity – **Ephesians 4:1-3, Philippians 2:1-2, 1 Corinthians 1:10**

## Concluding thoughts:

- ▶ These are some questions one can ask as they seek to find a church that is faithful to Christ.
- ▶ A church that dismisses ANY of these qualities as unimportant is NOT faithful.
- ▶ If you desire to go to heaven, do not seek to attend, “the church of your choice”.
- ▶ Rather, seek to find “the church of Christ’s choice”

## Concluding thoughts:

- ▶ We, here in Bellflower, are striving to be the church of Christ within this community.
- ▶ Can we improve? Absolutely! But our goal IS to respect God's pattern in all that we do and teach. We desire to represent our Lord according to His will.
- ▶ We welcome questions about these things and encourage you to open your Bible and study for yourself.



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Are you a part of His  
church?

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Let us pray!