

WHAT IS A NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH By Curtis Pugh

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In the New Testament we find certain characteristics or marks that are essential to all churches of the New Testament kind. A New Testament kind of church is the kind Jesus started. It is the kind He promised a continual existence. It is the kind He is pleased with today. It is His church. We believe it is the only kind of church that is acceptable to God. If we would find churches of the New Testament kind, we must look for those essential marks or characteristics which we find in the New Testament. Others have done this and some have left helpful information behind. For instance, some years ago a Southern Baptist Convention pastor, J.M Carroll, presented lectures in different places in the United States on the subject of Baptist history. His lectures were extremely popular among the Baptists, many of whom were ignorant of their own history. After his death his lecture notes were put in book form. We quote from the introduction to Bro. Carroll's little book, THE TRAIL OF BLOOD. (This little book has been translated into Romanian and is available free. If you wish to obtain this little book, contact the address printed on this booklet.) In the introduction to THE TRAIL OF BLOOD, Baptist pastor Clarence Walker wrote:

“In any town there are many different churches — all claiming to be the true church. Dr. Carroll did as you can do now — take the marks, or teachings, of the different churches and find the ones which have these marks, or doctrines. The ones which have these marks, or doctrines, taught in God's Word, are the true churches.”

It is clear that Jesus cannot be the founder of all the different “churches.” They have origins different from the church Jesus founded. They have different doctrines and different practices from the church Jesus founded. They have different doctrines and different practices from each other. He founded His kind of church because He wanted it to be a specific kind of church. He wanted it to have certain characteristics. Since God alone knows best what will please Him, it is logical that only the kind of church Christ founded can please Him. It is important that the reader keep this last statement in mind. God knows what pleases Him better than we do. Christ founded the kind of church He wanted. Men may think they know better than Christ and so they may make changes in Christ's churches or they may start their own kind of church, but Christ's churches are the kind He started. These are the kind of churches that please Him.

A few words about the importance of the churches is in order here. Just as the whole Bible is Christ centered, the whole New Testament has a second emphasis and that is the churches. The four Gospels tell us of the ministry of Christ and include His work in building His first church. The Book of Acts records how that one church evangelized and many were born from her through ordained men. The Epistles were mostly written to individual churches or groups of churches dealing with doctrinal and practical issues within the churches. Those New Testament books addressed to individuals were written to men who labored in the churches and in establishing new ones. The Book of Revelation has in it seven letters from Christ addressed to seven individual churches and the rest of the book deals with events, most of which take place prior to Christ returning to the earth to reign with His bride. So the New Testament certainly gives great importance to Christ's kind of New Testament churches! The words were addressed to members of churches – true churches – churches of the kind Jesus founded.

Christ is said to have a special love for His church (Eph. 5:25). She is so important to Him as to be pictured as His bride (John 3:29) and to her as the bride of Christ is given the work of evangelism in connection with the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:18-20; Rev. 22:17). Today, many would try to live for Christ, worship and serve God outside of Christ's kind of churches. Because of the importance of Christ's churches, as the New Testament evidences, we doubt whether such worship and service is acceptable to God and to Christ. After all, it is in the church that God is glorified through Christ Jesus (Eph. 3:21). Man made organizations glorify the man that founded them, often bearing his name. Only in true churches of Christ is the Lord Jesus Christ glorified. What true believer, taught in the Word, would try to please God outside of a God-approved church?

Jesus said, "I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). Jesus also promised that His presence would be with His Churches even down to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20). Because of these promises of Christ we can expect to find true New Testament Churches in existence somewhere in the world in our own time. They may not be in every city or even in every country and you may not have found them, but they exist.

If we would find the Lord's Churches we must not judge them according to our own ideas and preferences (Isa. 55:9). We must judge them according to the Word of God. They are not to be known by some special name, for anyone can use a name and claim that name makes them special. They are not to be known by temporary, external signs, but by those things which are essential and perpetual. They are not necessarily the churches of Christ because of their great size, popularity, prestige, or political influence. False churches are often the most popular and influential. It has always been true that God's people are a small number (Luke 12:32; Rom. 11:5; Isa. 1:9; John 6:65-67). God's remnant has never been influential in the eyes of the world or the world's religions. If God has given you eyes to see the truth about His remnant, you may be well

on the way to locating true New Testament churches. If your eyes are enthralled by size and worldly prestige, you are deceived already. Just because some group at the present time has the “advantage” does not make them Christ’s churches (see Jude verse 16).

Even in the days of the apostles some men left the truth (Acts 15:24; 1 John 2:19). They formed their own kind of “churches” with their “disciples” (Acts 20:30). Some of these, along with other defectors from the truth, gradually became the Catholic group. This group later split into the eastern and western branches. Later in history the Protestant Reformation occurred. At that time several men founded churches according to their own beliefs. They had their own ideas and preferences. They had many beliefs and practices that were identical to the Harlot. All of them believed in baptismal regeneration. They all practiced infant baptism for salvation. They brought this idea, and others, along with them when they were excluded from the Harlot church. These men did not follow the Bible regardless of what you may have heard. Neither did their churches. Neither do their churches follow the Bible today. They all teach and practice the soul-damning doctrine of baptismal regeneration. They “baptize” infants – admittedly without Scriptural instruction or example. The churches these “reformers” founded were their own and not Christ’s churches. These Protestant churches which exist today cannot be Christ’s churches because they (1) were founded by some man other than Jesus Christ and (2) preach a false gospel (see 2 Cor. 11:4 and Gal. 1:6), have different officers, different governments, etc., etc. Today’s more recent man-made churches are not the churches of Christ because they came out of these Protestant daughters of the Harlot. It is impossible to bring a clean thing out of an unclean thing (Job 14:4). Because of this impossibility a “reformation” of the Harlot (making an unclean thing clean) was not and is not possible! A genuine reformation did not take place for the filth of the false gospel of the Harlot still clings to the man-made churches which came out of her. Not only was and is a reformation impossible, none was needed! Christ had His churches on the earth so that it was not necessary to clean up (reform) the Harlot to make her Christ’s church. So we conclude that the “Protestant Reformation” accomplished no real good. It did produce some “churches” with less detestible doctrines and practices in the opinion of the world, but they are still the daughters of the harlot and are themselves harlots according to the Bible. (Rev. 17:5). The famous “Protestant Reformation” only produced more false churches – it did not produce Christ’s kind of New Testament churches. Any student of history will verify this for they know that the churches of the “Protestant Reformation” do not bear the marks of the churches of the New Testament.

In his book Bro. Carroll listed eleven marks or characteristics of true New Testament Churches. These are Scriptural marks. These are essential marks. Christ’s churches have borne these marks down through the centuries since He established the first one. The true churches of Christ bear these marks today. We are convinced that in our time this kind of church is to be found among

the people called Baptists. This is because of the (1) origin of the Baptists and (2) the doctrine and practice of mainline Baptists down through the centuries. We are convinced that some Baptist churches bear these eleven essential marks of New Testament churches. We are equally convinced that not all “Baptist churches” are true New Testament Churches. Any group can call themselves a “church.” Any “church” can call herself “Baptist.” Unless a church bears the essential marks of a New Testament Church they are not a true Church of Christ regardless of their name. Consider these eleven Scriptural marks of New Testament Churches and may God guide you in finding true New Testament churches – Christ’s churches!

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HE FIRST MARK OF A TRUE CHURCH: “The Head and Founder of New Testament Churches is CHRIST. He is the only lawgiver. The church is only the executive (Matt. 16:18; Col. 1:18).”

It is not enough just to say that Christ is the Head of a church! He must actually be the Head! He must direct the activities and work of the church. If Christ is not the Head of a church, He is only a figurehead. If Christ is not the Head of a church, He has no real part in that church. In order to be the Head of a church, Christ’s Word, the Bible, must be obeyed. If we would follow Christ, we cannot omit any part of the Lord’s instructions to us, nor can we add to them.

There are two errors into which men fall relative to the Headship of Christ over each church. Some would substitute a pope. They may not call him or her a pope. They may call him or her a pastor or a teacher or a prophet. It does not matter what he or she is called, if his ideas are followed instead of the instructions of Christ, he is a pope. Many “churches” today follow the teachings of some long-dead “pope” and are loyal to his interpretations of the Bible or to his additional “revelations” than they are to the simple words of the Bible. The second error is tradition and this error is more subtle. Traditions – Baptist traditions or traditions of the Harlot and her Protestant daughters – it does not matter the source. They all result in false worship. They are the commandments of men and are not according to truth (Matt 15:19). True worship must be not only a spiritual matter, it must be – it absolutely MUST be according to truth (John 4:23-24). The Bible has nothing good to say about religious traditions. In His entire ministry Jesus had nothing good to say about religious traditions! Jesus and His disciples did not conform to the religious traditions of His day (see Mark 7:1-7; Matt. 12:1-7). If we would be Christ’s churches, we must have nothing good to say about religious traditions. Since there is nothing good about them we must not follow them! Just as Jesus and His first church rejected the religious traditions of their day, so must we reject the religious traditions of our day. This is part of going outside the camp and bearing His reproach (Heb. 13:13).

The origin of religious traditions can universally be traced to paganism and idolatry. If the Bible is clear on anything, it is this: Christ’s church, His bride, is to be pure from idolatry (1 Cor. 10:14,

21; 1 John 5:21). Neither are the Lord's churches to be involved in Jewish observances and holy days (Gal. 4:9-11; Titus 1:14). Most certainly Christ's churches are not to participate in the pagan holidays that are popular with the world and the false churches of the world.

One thing is absolutely clear. A church that is ruled by anyone or anything other than Christ and His Word is not a New Testament kind of church. It is something else. Whether pope or tradition, anything or anyone that is followed other than Christ becomes the head of a church. Such a replacement means that the church has become another kind of church. It is not Christ's church for He is not the Head of it. He did not build that kind of church. He is not present in her meetings for she lacks His authority.

Christ gave to His churches certain rights or authority. He did not give them unlimited authority, but specific authority. This authority relates to the job He gave the churches to do while He is away. The first kind of authority Christ gave to His churches is judicial authority: by that we mean the authority to judge. Churches have only limited judicial power (1 Cor. 5:12-13). By following the democratic process (voting), the members of each church have the right to determine (judge) who is qualified for membership. In the same manner (voting) the members of each church have the right to determine who is to be excluded from the fellowship of the church (1 Cor. 5:9-13, note especially verse 12). Such action must be based, of course, on Christ's teachings concerning this matter (Matt. 18:15-17). This they must act according to the Word of God if they would be Christ's kind of church. They are equally responsible to treat those excluded members according to the New Testament (Matt. 18:17; 2 Thess. 3:15). The Bible does not teach shunning of excluded members. They are to actively seek the restoration of excluded members to full fellowship with the Church (Matt. 18:17, 2 Cor. 2:7). Based on the Bible and the Bible alone, churches have the authority to judge a man's preaching as to whether it is truth or not (1 Cor. 14:29; 1 John 4:1). So you see, a church has only limited judicial authority.

The second kind of authority Christ gave to His churches is executive power. This executive power is unlimited so that we can say that true Churches are executive in nature. By that we mean they are responsible to carry out the instructions of Christ who is to be the Head of each church (Luke 6:46). There is no limitation in this matter. There is no acceptable excuse for a church not carrying out the instructions of Christ. Churches are to obey Christ's instructions to them. They are to carry out His commandments and follow His example (Matt 28:18; 1 John 2:6). This is the reason Christ left His kind of churches on earth, that they might do exactly what He wants them to do.

There is a third kind of power and that is legislative power. Churches do not have legislative power! Christ did not give them legislative power. We mean they do not have authority to make rules and regulations. Christ is the lawgiver! They cannot change the rules, instructions and commandments given by Christ. They have no right to change the ordinances or any of the

teachings of the Bible. They have no right to change the Scriptural practices of the churches, or to make innovations in the worship of God. In their evangelism they must use only the methods of the New Testament, that is, the methods Christ and His apostles used. They have no authority to make innovations or to follow the inventions of men.

Christ established a church just as He promised He would do (Matt. 16:18). If He did not He is a liar at worst or a failure at best. (There is no Scripture that teaches that the church or anything else was founded on "Pentecost.") Christ built His church from material prepared by John the Baptist. From the first church that Christ established during His earthly ministry all true churches have descended. The New Testament pattern of church succession is this: baptized, ordained men who were acting in connection with an already-existing church traveled and evangelized, baptized converts and organized them into churches. This is clear from the Book of Acts. It is in this way that Christ's kind of churches have continued existence. Such a continuance of New Testament churches is not apostolic succession, ministerial succession, nor merely baptismal succession. New Testament churches start other New Testament churches through men whom they send forth to do this work. This is the New Testament pattern.

A church established in connection with anyone other than Jesus Christ is not His. A church that does not obey the New Testament certainly does not have Christ for her head. A church without Christ as her head is not a New Testament kind of church. Christ is both the Head and Founder of His New Testament kind of churches.

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THE SECOND MARK OF A TRUE CHURCH: "Its only rule of faith and practice—THE BIBLE (II Tim. 3:15-17)."

To accept the Bible as the only rule of faith and practice means that the Bible alone is the source and standard of truth. Additional "revelations" which are claimed by some people are not accepted as the Word of God in New Testament churches. Visions and dreams, "tongues" etc., of this modern era are not received as God's messages. The teaching (doctrine) and practice of a true Church must be according to the Bible. The rule of faith and practice of New Testament churches is not the approved dogma of some established religion. It is not the teaching of some seminary, institute, or university. It is not the dogma of some self-proclaimed "prophet" or "teacher." It is not the dogma of any association, convention, union, or other extra-biblical, man-made organization of churches. It is not a man-made confession of faith. (Such confessions may be good, but they cannot be authoratative. They cannot be the standard of judging truth.)

Only the Bible is authoratative! Only the Bible is the standard of determining what is truth. Neither can a true church select only certain portions of the New Testament to believe and obey. All the Bible is the Word of God and all is profitable (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 3:16). All of it is to be

believed.

Sound Baptists believe that you must have “chapter and verse” for everything believed, everything taught, and everything done in a New Testament church. It is to the Bible, the whole Bible, and the Bible alone they appeal for their doctrine and practice. A church which follows the Bible is better than one that does not. We do not mean that the people are better, but that the church is better because it is obedient to God. New Testament churches must base their doctrine and practice on the Bible. If a true church discovers that she is teaching or acting contrary to the Word of God she is constrained by her Biblical principles to change them so that she conforms to the Bible.

New Testament churches believe a great many things in common with many other churches, but they believe more. They believe all the counsel of God and, like Paul, are committed to proclaiming it even though it makes them unpopular (Acts 20:27). Any church which does not have as its only rule of faith and practice the Holy Bible is not a New Testament kind of church.

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THE THIRD MARK OF A TRUE CHURCH: “Its name—‘CHURCH,’ ‘CHURCHES’ (Matt. 16:18; Rev. 22:16).”

Christ’s churches have been called by many names down through the centuries. Most often these have been nicknames. These nicknames were given with the purpose of slandering Christ’s simple congregations of Scripturally baptized believers. The important thing here is to note that Christ’s churches have never sought prestige by claiming for themselves great and pompous names. They have never sought for worldly or worldwide recognition. They have never worked for power and prestige. They never have and never will fit in with the current popular “mega-church mania.” They have never sought for official status with any government as an official “state church.” “Disciples,” “the Way,” “sect of the Nazarenes,” “Christians” and “churches” are the terms used in the New Testament for those congregations which are Christ’s. From their beginning, the doctrine of true churches has been called heresy by worldly religionists (Acts 24:14). This is to be expected in every century. Those who stand for Bible truth stand against humanism in all its shapes.

When the churches were first established there was no need for distinguishing names. Then all churches were Christ’s true churches. However, with the apostasy of some, even in the early days of the churches, distinctions had to be made (2 Thess. 2:3; 1 John 2:19). The simple Bible-believing churches of Christ remained content to exist without claiming prestigious names for themselves. They would rather be right doctrinally and right with God rather than popular. They were content to let the world call them by whatever nickname was popular at the time. Down through the years some have been called Paulicians after Paul who was an apostle of the Lord

Jesus Christ. Others have been named for the region in which they were strongest. Some were slandered for their pure lives by being called Cathari or “pure ones.” Overall they were accused of being “ana-baptists” which means re-baptizers. They were called this because they insisted on baptizing aright all those who came to them from other groups. (They refused to accept the baptisms of churches which were not of like faith and practice with them. Refusing to accept the baptisms of different churches is the continued practice of Christ’s churches in our time. Sound churches accept as valid only baptisms administered by churches of like faith and practice with them.) So today, New Testament churches are willing to be called by an abbreviated form of “ana-baptist,” that is “Baptist.”

But it is not the name which makes a church a true church of Christ. Three things are essential for a church to be a true church: she must have the (1) proper origin, (2) correct doctrine and (3) Scriptural practices – it is these marks we are considering in this article which display the character of of Christ’s true churches.

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HE FOURTH MARK OF A TRUE CHURCH: “Its polity—CONGREGATIONAL—all members equal (Matt. 20:24-28; Matt. 23:5-12).”

Each New Testament church is a democracy under Christ the Head (Acts 1:26; 6:5; 15:22). That means that every member, young or old, male or female, rich or poor, educated or uneducated, free or slave, it matters not, each member has an equal voice in determining what the church does and does not do. It is wrong for one person to seek to rule a church (3 John 1:9-11). A New Testament church does not have as it’s head a dictator. Dictatorial powers can be held by one man or a committee or board of some sort. Sometimes a rich man will try to be the head of the church. Christ’s churches do not have such dictators for their head. Even the apostles were not dictators nor absolute rulers (2 Cor. 1:24) and neither are the officers of New Testament churches.

Jesus taught His church that they were all equals. That is true in Christ’s churches today. Each may have different gifts and therefore different responsibilities, but all are equal. All the members are “brethren.” Titles such as “doctor,” “reverend,” “father,” and such like are evil because they destroy that equality (Matt. 23:8). All members in fellowship with a New Testament church have an equal vote. That vote is to be exercised in business meetings, in the calling of a pastor and the dismissal of a pastor for just cause, in the selection of deacons, in determining who shall be admitted to membership in the church, and in the exclusion and restoration of wayward members, etc. (Acts 1:15-26; Acts 6:1-6). Pastors, deacons or other groups within a “church” which take away the democratic rights of the members of a church are thieves and unless they genuinely and publicly repent, should be excluded from the church.

Officers in a church are to be servants (Matt. 20:25-27; 2 Cor. 4:5; Eph. 6:6; 1 Cor. 9:19). They are not to be lords nor are they to be treated as such (1 Pet. 5:3). Even the apostles were not regarded as having lordship over the brethren (2 Cor. 1:24).

A New Testament kind of church is not a “republic. A “republic” is a form of government where the members elect a few from among them and these few make the decisions. Neither is a New Testament kind of church an “oligarchy.” An “oligarchy” is a government where power is in the hands of a few, perhaps in a board which chooses its own successors so as to perpetuate its own existence. Neither of these styles of government can be found in the New Testament. Simple, every-member democracy is the kind of government of a New Testament kind of church. In this way power is kept from the hands of a few. It is true that “power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Pure democracy is the best guard against corruption!

Paul wrote in Romans 12:17 that we are to “...Provide things honest in the sight of all men.” In light of this verse, secret meetings of the congregation or any portion thereof are seen to be contrary to the teaching of the Word of God and should not be allowed. The New Testament indicates that unbelievers were allowed in the meetings of the churches in the days of the apostles (see 1 Cor. 14:23, 24 for example). Paul testified that the ministry of Christ and His first church were done in the open for all to see (Acts 26:26). Why should we think it necessary to operate differently than our Lord and His first church operated?

Of a certainty, any church which does not practice real congregational government in its affairs is not a New Testament kind of church. Christ’s churches have a congregational or democratic church government. Anything more is without Scriptural basis.

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THE FIFTH MARK OF A TRUE CHURCH: “Its members—only saved people (Eph. 2:21; I Peter 2:5).”

Babies cannot be baptized into the membership of a New Testament church for they are not believers and faith is required for baptism. (Acts 8:37). So, a church which has infant members is not a New Testament kind of church. Neither can a state church be a New Testament kind of church for in these “churches” all citizens are automatically church members. Only those who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit are acceptable as candidates for baptism. Only those who give the evidence of true repentance and faith, are eligible to be members of one of Christ’s churches. For this we have the whole testimony of the New Testament beginning with John the Baptist (Matt. 3:18).

Being the child of believing parents does not qualify a person for baptism and church membership. Having grown up in a Christian home and in church does not qualify a person for baptism and church membership. Attendance at catechism classes does not qualify a person for

baptism and church membership. Performing some kind of physical response to an appeal at the close of a religious meeting does not qualify a person for baptism and church membership. Experiencing some kind of ecstatic or unusual religious experience does not qualify a person for baptism and church membership. Conversion (true repentance, faith, baptism, a changed life) – these are the outward evidences of the new birth. Apart from this new birth – the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit – no person is qualified for church membership. Mere words of testimony from a candidate for membership will not suffice. In the New Testament evidence was required before a doubtful candidate was received into membership (Acts 9:26). Biblical evidence of regeneration must be seen in the life of the individual. A church which carelessly admits unsaved people as members has ceased being a true church where spiritual sheep are fed the Word of God. It has become a synagogue of Satan (Rev. 2:9; Rev. 3:9). It will be observed that such a “synagogue” will soon have as its chief business the entertainment of spiritual goats. There will be much talk about the Word of God, the worship of God, evangelism, etc., but this is merely a smokescreen. It is the way of the flesh to substitute carnal religious activity in the place of flesh-mortifying genuine spirituality. These synagogues of Satan shall fill up their time and occupy themselves with musicals, recitals, theatricals, sports, parties, feasts, holiday celebrations, political endeavors, denominational organizations and other activities which are pleasing to the fleshly minded. These things they must do to keep the spiritual goats happy and in attendance (at least part of the time) at the “church.” Any church which accepts as members those people who do not give genuine evidence of an inner change of heart cannot be a New Testament church (Matt. 3:7-9). A New Testament church is composed of professing believers whose lives give evidence of a genuine spiritual regeneration – a new birth in the inner man. Anything else is a different kind of church.

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HE SIXTH MARK OF A NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH: “Its ordinances—BELIEVERS’ BAPTISM, FOLLOWED BY THE LORD’S SUPPER (Matt. 28:19-20).”

Christ gave to His church ordinances. He did not give them sacraments. Sacraments are rituals with saving ability. Ordinances are memorial observances. They cause the children of God to seriously remember and contemplate the finished work of Christ and they display the Gospel of Christ to the world (1 Cor. 11:26). They picture the finished work of Christ. The ordinances are the Gospel in picture form.

Christ gave to His church two and only two ordinances. He did not give any others. Marriage in the church is not an ordinance. Last rites are not an ordinance. Being buried in sacred soil is not an ordinance. Christening babies is not an ordinance. Dedicating babies is not an ordinance. The ritual washing of feet is not an ordinance. The wearing of robes or other special clothing is

not an ordinance. The ceremonial washing of pots and the dedication of buildings are not ordinances. Nor are any other rituals, traditions, and ceremonies which are popular with the religious world. The two church ordinances are baptism and the Lord's supper.

These two ordinances are church ordinances. They are not pastor ordinances nor deacon ordinances. By that we mean that neither the pastor nor the deacons have control or authority over these ordinances. It is the church that must decide (vote) as to who is qualified to be baptized and be admitted to church membership. Neither the pastor nor the deacons nor any other group within a church has that authority. It is the church who must authorize the pastor or another Brother to administer baptism. Similarly, it is the church who must authorize the pastor or another Brother to administer the supper. These two ordinances are church ordinances in that baptism is a prerequisite to church membership and the door to it. Baptism and church membership are only related to a "local" church. A person cannot Scripturally hold membership in more than one church at a time. The Lord's Supper is to be observed by a "local" church only so that discipline can be maintained (1 Cor. 5:11; 11:20). Non-members of a church cannot Scripturally participate in the supper.

Scriptural baptism includes (1) a Scriptural candidate, (2) a Scriptural motive, (3) a Scriptural mode, and (4) a Scriptural administrator. If any one of these four requirements is lacking, the act is invalid. Only believers are Scriptural candidates, that is, only they are qualified to be baptized (Acts 8:37). Thus those "baptized" in infancy are not Scripturally baptized. There is neither Biblical commandment nor example for infant baptism. Those who "baptize" babies do so because they attribute to baptism a saving ability, thus their motive for baptism is unscriptural. All agree that immersion in water (not in grape juice or some other liquid) is the original and therefore Scriptural mode. Thus pouring or sprinkling are not Scriptural modes. Those "baptized" by the Harlot or her daughters (Rev. 17:5) are not Scripturally baptized for they are not His bride and therefore lack Christ's authority. A church which receives the unscriptural "baptisms" of apostate or man-made "churches" cannot be regarded as a virgin bride of Christ which ought to be the goal of every church and every pastor for the church he serves (2 Cor. 11:2). Such a "church" has polluted herself with the Harlot and her daughters (Rev. 18:4). Such a polluted church is not a true church and cannot be regarded as a Scriptural administrator of baptism. And no person can be Scripturally allowed to partake of the Lord's Supper until he has been Scripturally baptized. This is the pattern of the whole New Testament. Thus those with polluted "baptisms" are not eligible to partake of the Lord's Supper.

We have often heard of parents preserving the possessions of a child who had gone away from home exactly the way the child left them. They wanted the child's things to be exactly the way he wanted them when he returned. We can understand that. We can identify with that. We can understand the friends of Christ wanting to preserve the ordinances of Christ just as He left

them to His churches (John 15:14). What we cannot understand is one of Christ's friends wanting to change the things Christ left to us. But there are some who would say it does not matter as to the candidate, the mode, the motive or the administrator of baptism. They say that sincerity is enough. The details of baptism do not matter. Others would omit one or more of the requirements for baptism as stated above. Similarly there are some who would say it does not matter what kind of bread or drink is used in the supper. Some preachers in America are so liberal and care so little for the things of Christ that they say the Lord's supper can be observed by eating a McDonald's hamburger and drinking a coke! They too say sincerity is enough. They say it does not matter what elements are used in the supper. We do not know, but we do not think these are true friends of Christ.

We believe that the Supper, like baptism must meet four requirements to be a valid and Scriptural observance of the ordinance Christ left. There must be (1) Scriptural participants, (2) a Scriptural motive for eating and drinking, (3) Scriptural elements, and (4) a Scriptural administrator. Briefly stated (because of lack of space) we believe the Bible teaches that Scriptural participants are the members in good standing of one New Testament church. The Scriptural motive for eating the supper is to proclaim the Lord's death. It is the communion of a church with her Head. It is NOT the communion of believers one with another. Such a thing is not taught in the New Testament. The Scriptural elements are unleavened bread and wine. The Scriptural administrator is a New Testament church. Ordinarily the Supper is administered by the pastor, but in the absence of a pastor, the church may authorize a Brother to administer the supper because the ordinances are church ordinances and not tied to any specific office within the church.

The supper instituted by the Lord consisted of wine and unleavened bread. We know the bread was unleavened because Christ instituted the supper very near the time of the Passover feast. During that season it was forbidden even to have leaven in the houses anywhere in Israel (Exodus 12:15). No leavened bread was available! Furthermore we know that the bloody sacrifices of the Lord could not include leaven (Ex. 34:25). If this was true of natural sacrifices, how much more is it true of the one true sacrifice of Christ's own body and blood! We know that the Jews have consistently used wine from the beginning as the only drink at the Passover meal. We know that wine and not grape juice was used because the grape harvest was in August or September. The Lord instituted His supper in the spring. No grape juice was available then! Lacking refrigeration, the Jews allowed their grape juice to ferment and so to be conserved. When fermentation is complete the leaven is dead. The wine is poured off its lees and the wine is clear and free from leaven. This procedure which is a part of wine making is alluded to in Jeremiah 48:11. Leaven pictures sin, particularly the sin of hypocrisy (Luke 12:1). To picture the body and blood of Christ using elements containing leaven is to picture the body and blood of

Christ as sinful. A sinful Christ could save no one. Because of the significance of these things, the elements are important as they “preach” in a visible way the Gospel of Christ.

We do not understand those who wish to change the ordinances of Christ for ease, pleasure or comfort. Some who call themselves “Christians” have changed the mode of baptism. They have said that immersion is not dignified, that it is unpleasant, that it is inconvenient, etc., and thus have justified to themselves changing it to sprinkling or pouring. Others have changed the elements in the Supper and have given various excuses for doing so. Rather than use wine, some have preferred grape juice, but there is nothing symbolical about grape juice other than the fact it symbolizes the sin of hypocrisy for it is filled with leaven. Some have given as a reason for changing the misuse of alcohol. But who would dare say that the small amount of wine consumed by an individual in the Supper is the abuse of alcohol. People will use considerably more alcohol in cough medicine without a thought, but then refuse to obey the Bible in the use of wine. They will do for their physical bodies what they will not do for their souls. One of the most ridiculous excuses ever heard for ceasing to use wine was that the wine tasted bad! Have the people of God become so pleasure-loving and so in love with comforts and ease that they cannot stand the taste of wine? Was not the cup which Christ drank for His people a bitter cup? Even Israel from ancient times was required to eat bitter herbs along with the Passover lamb (Ex. 12:8; Num. 9:11). Besides all that, where did we get the idea that the Lord’s Supper – the remembrance of His awful suffering and death – should be suited to the effeminate tastes of soft, modern “Christians?” Those who claim to be the friends of Christ and yet who do not obey Him we think are not true friends (John 15:14).

But we do know most certainly that to change the ordinances into soul-saving sacraments or to claim that through the observance of rituals grace is bestowed on the participant is to pervert the Gospel of the grace of God. A church cannot be a true church of Christ if she preaches a false gospel of works whether in words or in the ordinances which picture the Gospel.

T

THE SEVENTH MARK OF A NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH: “Its officers—PASTORS AND DEACONS (I Tim. 3:1-16).”

A hierarchy of ministers, priests, prelates, metropolitans, cardinals, etc., etc., is unknown to the Bible. Two and only two ordained offices are known to the Bible. Those two offices are pastors and deacons. The office of deacon was instituted only in the church when the number of members was extremely large and there was a genuine need for such a position. The church existed prior to the existence of this office and a New Testament church can exist without a deacon or deacons today if they are not needed. The office of deacon is subject to the oversight of the pastor (Acts 20:17, 28). These offices were usually filled in the Bible by God raising up

men from within the congregation. He enabled them to do the work to which He called them. “Professionalism” in the ministry was unknown. The idea that a man can attend a Bible institute or seminary and by that be qualified to preach and to pastor is not a Biblical concept at all. It is the way of the world and not the way of God, and it has done great harm. Moses and Paul were educated men, but before God used them, He “reeducated” them in the desert. God is still training His servants in His way!

These two offices are limited to men only. Women are to be silent in the churches and therefore cannot serve as preachers, pastors, teachers of men, pastors, etc. (1 Cor. 14:34, 35). The men who fill these offices are to be servants of the church (2 Cor. 4:5; Matt. 20:27; Matt. 23:11; Mark 9:35; 1 Cor. 9:19). The Greek word “deacon” means a servant. While the deacons are to be concerned with the physical and financial needs of the people, the pastors ought to give themselves to the ministry of the Word and to prayer (Acts 6:4). It is the job of the pastor to feed the sheep (John 21:16). He is not a pope nor is he to exercise lordship over the congregation which he serves (1 Pet. 5:3). The office of pastor is not that of an overlord or administrator. He is to be settled among the people he serves, to share their joys and sorrows, to experience the same standard of living as they enjoy or endure, and is to care for the people as a father for his family although he is only another Brother.

These officers are necessarily subject to the discipline of the church in which they serve. Sins committed by deacons or pastors, like those of any other member, can result in their exclusion from the church. The church has executive authority over these two ordained officers. They serve at her pleasure. If they do not, they are untouchable overlords and will become corrupt in their offices. The love of money, prestige, power, etc., will consume them and destroy both their ministries and their churches.

Any church which has a hierarchy of overlords whatever they be called is not a New Testament church.

T

HE EIGHTH MARK OF A NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH: “Its work—getting folks saved, baptizing them (with a baptism that meets all the requirements of God’s Word), teaching them (‘to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you’) (Matt. 28:16-20).”

God has given to His churches all that is needed to do His work (2 Tim. 3:17). The Word of God is all that is needed to accomplish the work God gave to His church. Psychological tricks, emotional manipulations, entertainments, charismatic personalities, musical talents, and high-pressure tactics do not accomplish the work of God. All the man-made, humanistic Arminian tactics in the world will not add one person to the number God has elected to salvation. He will save His elect. They shall “come” (John 6:37). In the salvation of His elect God uses legitimate

and Scriptural means and has given His churches work to do. The work of God given to His churches is three-fold: (1) Scriptural evangelization, (2) Scriptural baptism, (3) Scriptural teaching of converts in New Testament churches. The Spirit of God working in connection with the preaching of the Word of God is what accomplishes the work of God! This work does not require magnificent buildings, worldly entertainment, shows, or a professional church staff. The proof that none of these things are necessary is this: none of the churches of the New Testament had any of these things, yet they accomplished the work of God in their places! Churches which become entangled with huge buildings, worldly programs, spectacular entertainment and paid professionals become slaves to such things and cease doing the work Christ intends for His Churches to do. We believe this is true of both individuals and churches (2 Tim. 2:4). Any church which is not involved in doing the three-fold work of Christ in Christ's way cannot be a New Testament kind of church.

T

HE NINTH MARK OF A NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH: "Its financial plan—'Even so (TITHES and OFFERINGS) hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel' (I Cor. 9:14)."

A New Testament church must be autonomous (self-governing). This is the whold New Testament pattern. It also must be self-supporting in whatever measure is possible. Sometimes churches become destitute and need financial help. Perhaps at times they need the supply of ministerial help. A church may need special help at critical times in their existence. That is one thing. But continually depending on other churches for money is not God's way of finance. Pastors are to be paid by the church that they pastor. This is right and Biblical. However, sometimes it is necessary that pastors work at secular employment. Paul worked a few times as a tentmaker to meet his own needs and the needs of others. Church members, regardless of poverty or riches, need to be taught to do their part in supporting their church. The tithes is an equal burden among the members. Churches are not to be robbers. They are not to require their members to contribute more than is right. Churches are not to engage in business schemes, bazzars, carnivals or other means of making money. Neither should they ask the world to help them pay their bills. Surely if God is in a church and what it is doing, He can from the members raise the funds needed to sustain the work through tithes and offerings. Churches, like families, should not attempt to live beyond their income. To do so is bad business and eventually those who go this way will come to ruin.

A church which cannot pay its own bills needs to reduce their overhead until they can meet their obligations from among themselves. Pastors ought not to become beggars whether before the world or before other churches. This is dishonoring to Christ! He is the Head and Bridegroom of

each church. He is responsible to supply the needs of His virgin bride. Neither should a church of Christ adopt the attitude of the world and the world's churches with regard to a visible display of wealth. The world's churches display their wealth in magnificent buildings, expensive clothing, jewelry, fine furnishings, costly equipment and other things which impress those who are worldly minded. It must always be remembered that a church is made up of the members. A church is not the building, the equipment, the furnishings, the automobiles or other things regarded as important to the world and its churches.

Any church that resorts to the ways of the world and the world's churches for its financial needs is not a New Testament kind of church. New Testament churches strive to be self-supporting in their finances.

T

THE TENTH MARK OF A NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH: "Its weapons of warfare—spiritual, not carnal (II Cor. 10:4; Eph. 6:10-20)."

False churches, that is the Harlot and her harlot daughters and "the abominations of the earth," their pastors and other officers hate the truth. They hate Christ's true churches which stand for the truth (Rev. 17:5, 6). Worldly religious organizations make use of political maneuvering, political connections, political pressure and the currying of favor of this world's governments. False churches are determined to have the approval of the world's religious groups and the world's governments regardless of the cost. They are worldly minded and seek after the things of the world. They form extra-biblical alliances to further their goals. They mean harm to Christ's New Testament kind of churches. They will use their worldly influence with the government to make things difficult for religious groups who refuse to have a part in their ecumenical projects for Christ's churches have ever opposed the union of churches into one organization. They resort to intimidation, threats, lies and even inciting men to do physical harm to those who disagree with them. It is observable that every man-made religious organization of churches eventually falls into the trap of promoting the union of churches into one world-wide "church." In their unions they sink to the lowest common denominator and thus come to promote ecumenicalism. Thus, eventually, false churches and their organizations become active against those who oppose the union of all religions into one ecumenical church. Such are the worldly weapons of worldly religionists. Those who possess this persecuting spirit toward the followers of Christ demonstrate that they themselves are without the new birth. They prove that they do not know the Lord Jesus nor His Father (John 15:18-21, John 16:1-3).

But God has given His churches greater weapons than those of the world's churches. They are enumerated for us in Eph. 6:13-18. The use of these spiritual weapons has been demonstrated in the lives of those New Testament preachers and saints who walked this way before us. Those

weapons are “truth,” “righteousness,” “the preparation of the Gospel of peace,” “faith,” “salvation,” “the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God,” and persevering “prayer,” and “supplication.”

Any church which uses the weapons of this world cannot be a New Testament kind of Church. New Testament churches use New Testament weapons to accomplish the work of Christ.

T

THE ELEVENTH MARK OF A NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH: “Its independence—separation of Church and State (Matt. 22:21).”

“What has Christ to do with Caesar?” This is ever the watchword of the Lord’s true New Testament kind of churches. The Bible teaches and true churches require that their members be good citizens of the country in which they find themselves. They are to be obedient to all the laws of the land unless those laws are contrary to the Word of God (1 Pet. 2:13-17, Acts 4:18,19). But that same Bible teaches that the various governments of this world have no control over the churches in their doctrine, their worship or their service to God. Neither are the Lord’s churches to join themselves to this world’s governments. Neither are they to receive financial support from the government. When they do so they cease to be the servants of Christ for the governments of this world require obedience of their partners (Rom. 6:16, 1 Cor. 7:23, 1 Pet. 2:19). Let those whose hearts are inclined to worldly things seek the prestige, favor, power, and political connections which governments are willing to exchange for control over those churches who join with them.

But a church is guilty of spiritual adultery and cannot be a New Testament kind of church if she is joined to a governmental power. This was the case with Israel (Isa. 30:1-3; Rev. 17:1,2; Hosea 8:9, Ezek. 16:23-35). Surely it is no different in the case of churches.

Christ’s churches are subject to Christ as their Head. In doing so, they cannot be subject in spiritual matters to any government. Thus they are to be independent of governmental control whether civil government or the government of some religious institution.

C

CONCLUSION: The Word of God is clear. Regardless of what a church may try to claim, if that church does not measure up to the essential characteristics of the churches of the New Testament, that church is not a New Testament Church. Those who call themselves Baptists ought to be New Testament Christians who worship and serve God in New Testament Baptist Churches. If churches exist which are not the New Testament kind of churches they are not pleasing to Christ. They are mere religionists and partakers of the sins of the Harlot and shall receive of her plagues (Rev. 18:4).

If you are vitally interested in being a member of a New Testament kind of church and cannot locate one in your area, we invite you to contact us. We will do our best to help you locate such a church. If such a church does not exist in your area, we will be happy to do what we can to see that one is organized there for the glory of Jesus Christ and the spiritual well-being of the children of God! Amen.

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