



Identifying the True
CHURCH

Mark W. Fenison, Ph.D.

Identifying the True Church?

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By

Mark W. Fenison, Ph.D.

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3 Alpine Ct. Vader, WA

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Introduction

There has been, and there are no greater questions than the two basic questions that divide Christendom today, and they are, “*what is the true nature of the church*” and “*what are the minimal essentials to be a true New Testament church*”? These questions gave rise to the very first and earliest debate on the nature of the church in the fourth century. Leonard Verduin said of this debate on the nature of the church:

No one knew better than did Augustine just what was at issue in the conflict that had flared up between the Catholics and the Donatists. Said he, “*The issue between us and the Donatists is about the question where this body is to be located, that is, what and where is the church?*” (*Inter nos autem et Donatistas quaestio est, ubi sit hoc corpus, id est, ubi sit ecclesia? See Ad Catholicos Epistula II, 2.*)” – Leonard Verduin, **The Reformers and Their Stepchildren**, [Erdmann’s, 1964], p. 33 footnote.

Verduin further claimed that this issue between a congregational kind of church, as defended by the ancient Donatists, and a universal kind of church as defended by Augustine continued to divide Christendom all the way up to the Reformation (Ibid. p. 35). The Reformation brought a brand new concept to the debate – the idea of a universal *invisible* church. The great German church historian, Dr. Augustus Neander lamented that if the Donatists and Augustine had known of the Reformation doctrine of the universal *invisible* church theory it would have resolved their conflict in his

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estimation.¹ That very lamentation demonstrates that such a doctrine never existed between the first and sixteenth centuries. However, when the Reformers brought forth this new doctrine the Reformation Anabaptists charged the Reformers with inventing two different churches, just as the ancient Donatists had charged Augustine with inventing two different kinds of churches when he brought forth the idea of a “universal” church.

It cannot be doubted that the Reformation doctrine of the universal *invisible* church has given justification not only for the various Reformation denominations to call themselves “churches” and “the church” but has justified the origin of thousands of denominations that exist today, all of which claim to be true churches of Christ.

This is the issue that stares right into the face of outside of observers of Christianity. Over 30,000 different denominations within Christendom! This is the question that echoes in the mind of the newly converted Christian! “*Which denomination is true to the Scriptures? Or is there any denomination better than any other denomination?*”

This is not an issue about whether any person or any denomination or church knows all truth. Neither is this an issue

¹ In Neander’s second volume in the content page it says, “*Fundamental error common to both parties – the failure to distinguish between the visible and the invisible church.*” – Neander, August, **General History of the Christian Religion and Church**. Volume 2, (Boston; Crocker and Brewster, 1872) “contents” p. xv. Then on page 238 he says, “*Both parties were involved in the same grand mistake with regard to the conception of the church, by their habit of confounding the notions of the invisible and of the visible church with each other.*”

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about whether saved people can be found within the vast majority of denominations, or even within what many regard as Christian cults. Obviously, no person or church knows all truth as that would require omniscience. Saved persons can be found in most, if not in all denominations. All the churches found in the New Testament were not without some error.

Although no one needs to know all truth to become a Christian, they must know at least the bare minimal essentials of salvation to be a Christian. Likewise, no church must know all truth to be recognized as a true church of Christ. However, in order to be a true church of Christ, such a church must at least know and practice the minimal truths that characterize all true churches found in the scriptures.

This is not an issue about salvation, but about discovering and defining the minimal Biblical characteristics that distinguish a true New Testament church from apostate churches.

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Essential Considerations

In order to identify true churches of Christ there are some minimal assumptions that should be considered.

A. Three Basic Assumptions

Let's start with some basic assumptions. **First**, would you agree that not every group of people who claim to be a New Testament Church is such? For example, as of 2006 there are over 30,000 different kinds of denominations within Christendom. The Bible clearly says that God is not the author of confusion (I Cor. 14:31). However, these denominations are divided over the most basic and essential issues.

For example, many are divided over the true identity of God. Jehovah's Witnesses claim He is one Person – the Father. United Pentecostals claim He is one person – Jesus Christ. Mormons believe that every human being has god potential. Most evangelical denominations claim that there is one God manifested in three co-equal, co-eternal Persons, The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

They are divided over Christ's identity. They are divided over whether the Bible is the completed Revelation of God or even if it is the inspired Word of God. They are divided over how people are saved and the nature of the gospel. They are divided over the nature, purpose and administration of the ordinances and the list goes on and on.

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Can we agree that not everything that calls itself a church of Christ is such? You may call yourself the President of the United States, but does that make it so? A group of religious people may call themselves the church of Christ, but does that make them so? If so, then the Jehovah's Witnesses are as much a true church of Christ as the Roman Catholic Church and everything in between! Do you get my point? Merely making the claim does not make it so!

Second, consider the label or name over a church building. Does the label over the door define the people meeting inside the building or is it the content of their beliefs that really define them? For example, I could take two cans of vegetables, one can containing corn and the other beans. I could switch the labels so that the corn label is on the beans and the bean label is on the can of corn. Now, is it the label that determines the content of the cans, or is it what you actually find inside that determines its contents? Get my point? True churches of Christ are not determined by their name or title. They are defined by what they believe and practice and whether or not what they believe harmonizes with the Word of God. For example, the term "Baptist" means nothing, since under that title can be found every shade of doctrine under the sun.

Third, would you agree, that just as, there are minimum essentials that distinguish a human being from an ape, and just as there are minimum essentials that distinguish non-Christian people from Christian people, there must be also minimum essentials that distinguish true from false churches? Apes have two eyes, one nose, one mouth, two arms and two legs just as humans have such

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characteristics, but does that make them humans???? Similarities do not mean humans and apes are the same species. It is not the similarities, but the essential distinctions that distinguish apes from humans. Likewise, all churches in all denominations may share some similarities (common terminology, religious, believe in God, practice ordinances, assembly regularly, call themselves the church of Christ or a New Testament church, etc.) but it is not general similarities that distinguish between true and false churches. The real question is whether or not a particular church shares the minimum essentials that Scriptures demand is necessary to be a true New Testament Church! We believe the New Testament clearly and unmistakably identifies the minimal essentials to be a true church of Christ. In fact, what all refer to as “The Great Commission” in Matthew 28:19-20 contain some of these minimum essentials that distinguish true from false churches until the end of the world.

B. The Great Commission Goal/Focus

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen. – Matthew 28:19-20

The Great Commission contains minimal essentials that are easy and clear to see once a few specifics are pointed out and clarified. For example, notice that the words “*teach*” (v. 19) and “*teaching*” (v. 20) are both found in this commission. The first

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word “*teach*” found in verse 19 translates an Aorist tense imperative Greek verb that literally means “*make disciples*.” The term “*disciple*” refers to *one who follows* or takes up the doctrine and practice of another (in this case the doctrine and practice of Christ). A “*heretic*” is one who departs from the essential doctrine and practice of Christ. Hence, to “*make disciples*” means *to make followers of like faith and order* with Christ (“*whatsoever I have commanded you*”) rather than to produce heretics. The Great Commission is a comprehensive *command* to **reproduce after their own kind**. They are not to produce followers of a different doctrine and practice (heretics) but followers of Christ’s doctrine and practice (disciples).

The second word “*teaching*” found in verse 20 translates a present tense Greek participle that literally means to “*instruct*” and it is further modified by the term “*observe*.” What is conveyed in general terms by “*make disciples*” in verse 19 is made more specific in verse 20 by the phrase “*teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you*.” The kind of instruction intended here is more than giving a mental grasp of truths or doctrines of the teacher, but the practical observance, or implementation of this instruction into the life of the disciple. Hence, the emphasis here is replicating Christ’s system of belief and practice in the life of disciples. Together, these terms demand that a specific type of disciple, one who is like faith and order with Christ. This is the focus or design of this commission – to reproduce “*disciples*” of like faith and order with Christ. Notice, the great commission was given to the eleven as “*disciples*” (Mt. 28:16 “*disciples*”). Matthew 28:19-20 defines a disciple as one who has been through the process of discipleship or is a person

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who follows Christ as defined by the process provided in Matthew 28:19-20.

C. The Great Commission Process

Therefore, the Great Commission goal/focus of the commissioned is the same as the Genesis principle, which is to reproduce "**after their own kind.**" That is what a "disciple" is! He is one who has embraced and observes the same faith and order as his master. In order that this goal might be accomplished there is a three step process spelled out clearly in this commission. There are three participles that identify this process.

These three participles are translated (1) "*go*" (2) "*baptizing*" and (3) "*teaching.*" These three participles provide the basic fundamental three step procedure or mode of operation in reaching this commissioned goal.

The first step in achieving this commissioned goal has to do with the first participle. The first Greek participle translated "*go*" is found in the Aorist tense, and is viewed, as a completed action already accomplished prior to the other two participle actions which are both found in the present tense. Literally, the text should be understood to read "*after having already gone to all nations preaching the gospel*" (Mk. 16:15; Lk. 24:46). It assumes the gospel has already been preached, and there are those who have responded properly to the gospel in repentance and faith, or those described as "*them*" in the remainder of this commission. It is this contextual evangelized "*them*" who are proper subjects for baptism

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and indoctrination (Mt. 19: b-20). It is these respondents to the gospel that are addressed as “*them*” by the next two participles (“*baptizing....teaching*”).

Here is a very important essential that characterizes all true churches of Christ. True churches of Christ administer baptism and bring into their membership for teaching only those who have first been evangelized through the preaching of the gospel and manifest repentance and faith in reaction to the preaching of the gospel. It is this kind of material that makes up the proper membership of all true New Testament churches. This repudiates infant baptism and infant church membership and/or the baptism and membership of unbelieving, unrepentant adults. This is the first absolute essential characteristic of a true New Testament church. New Testament churches are composed of only those who profess repentance and faith in the gospel.

The second step in this process of disciple making is to baptize those who received the gospel. There are seven distinct characteristics about this second step. **First**, the proper candidates are those who have already responded properly to the gospel as demonstrated previously. **Second**, take note that Christ did not authorize self-baptism, but rather designated an authorized administrator (“*ye*”) to baptize (“*them*”). Thus, this is a baptism administered by others rather than self-administered baptism. It is not administered by just anyone, but by those already recognized as “*disciples*” of Christ (vv. 16-20) or those who have already been through this process of discipleship (“*have commanded you*”). **Third**, this is not any kind of baptism. Notice it is administered in the name of the Triune God (“*in the name of the Father, and of the*

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Son and of the Holy Ghost.) The proper administrator believes in the Triune God of the Bible. **Fourth**, it is by immersion only, as the Greek term translated “*baptizing*” is used only of immersion and no other mode. The Greek has terms for sprinkling (*rantizo*) and pouring (*epicheo*) are found in the scripture, but never once in regard to this ordinance. **Fifth**, the only possible baptism being commissioned here is the baptism of **The Baptist** (Mt. 3:1), as this is the only baptism Jesus and all of his disciples submitted to and/or administered up to this point (Jn. 4:1-2; Lk. 7:29-30), and it is the only existent baptism. There is no other record of any of them being rebaptized under any other kind of baptism. *Baptist* baptism is the only baptism Christ submitted to and, he claimed that all who rejected it, rejected “*the counsel of God against themselves*” (Lk. 7:30). No other water baptism has been approved by the Father and included in the pre-Pentecost Great Commission “*unto the end of the world.*” **Sixth**, scriptural baptism precedes being assembled and taught how to observe all things (Mt. 28:19-20; Acts 2:40-41). Baptized believers are “added unto” the assembly (Acts 2:41). Indeed, it is impossible to observe the final aspect of this commission without assembling with them in the very same congregational body of baptized believers. **Seventh**, the only authorized administer for baptism are those who are like faith and order with Christ. This commission authorizes only those (“*ye*”) who are already “*disciples*” by faith and practice.

This last essential characteristic is definitive of all true churches of Christ. Christ never authorized anyone who preaches “*another gospel*” or administers another baptism or teaches another faith and practice to baptize. Scriptural baptism is administered only by

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those like faith and order with Christ in these essential Great Commission aspects.

Therefore, the first two steps establish that (1) only evangelized believers are proper subjects for baptism; (2) that proper baptism has seven essentials to be recognized as Scriptural baptism. Now, let's proceed to the third step.

The third step is bringing these baptized believers together into a teaching assembly where they are instructed how to observe all things Christ commanded. There was no other possible way to teach "*them*" how to "*observe all things*" apart from actually assembling "*them*" together underneath the authorized administrators of the commission ("*ye....you*"). For example, they could not be taught how to "*observe*" Matthew 18:15-17 apart from actual membership in a church characterized by these Great Commission essentials. Neither could they be taught how to "*observe*" the Lord's Supper in Matthew 26:12-30 apart from actual physical gathering together in one place (1 Cor. 11:17-18, 20, 23 "*one place*"). Hence, this plural authorized "*ye*" is the New Testament congregation consisting of "*disciples*" or those in the teaching/observing process. Therefore, a "*disciple*" is one who has been evangelized, then followed the Lord in water baptism as defined by the seven characteristics in this commission, and brought into a congregational body of baptized believers in order to be instructed how to observe all things commanded.

Moreover, this third step includes essential faith and practice which is later referred to as "*the apostles doctrine*" (Acts 2:41) or "*the faith*" once delivered (Jude 3) or "*the doctrine*" (Rom. 16:17)

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or the “*doctrine of Christ*” (Heb. 6:1), which was first orally *passed down* (“*the Tradition*” – 2 Thes. 3:6) and then written down by inspiration (1 Thes. 2:13; 2 The. 2:12; 2 Pet. 3:15-17) and included within the New Testament scriptures.

These “*things*” are the essential doctrines and practices found in the New Testament scriptures. They include all the essentials found in the Great Commission. However, they include much more. The absolute essentials can be identified under three basic principles; (1) Everything the New Testament explicitly claims to be essential and/or those things which Scriptures explicitly state “*must*” be believed or explicitly states that cannot be rejected; (2) Everything essential to distinguish New Testament Christianity from other world religions and/or predicted apostasy; (3) Everything essential to preserve and perpetuate the first two principles. These principles characterized all absolute essentials that must be found in all true churches of Christ.

Let us further consider the Biblical and logical nature of these three last stated principles. There are explicit teachings in God’s Word that we are expressly told they are a “*must*”, as they are inclusive of essentials to be a truly saved person. Some examples are John 3:3-7 and the new birth. Another example is Luke 13:3, 6 and Luke 24:47 or gospel repentance. There are explicit teachings that we are forbidden under penalty if we deny or distort. For example, Galatians 1:6-9 forbids under penalty that we should preach “*another gospel*” as the consequence is “*let him be accursed.*” There are many more such examples in Scriptures of “*must*” essential doctrines or practices.

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Consider the second principle. If the Scriptures did not provide essential characteristics of predicted apostate Christianity, then how would anyone know the difference between true and apostate Christianity. Some of these essentials are found in Galatians 1:8-9, 1 Tim. 4:1-5; 2 Thes. 2:1-13; etc. Furthermore, if the Bible did not contain distinct and essential characteristics that distinguished Biblical Christianity from other world religions then what difference would it make what religion you embraced? For example consider some of the following essential teachings that distinguish Christianity from other world religions:

1. The Bible as God's final authority in faith and practice – Isa. 8:19-20; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:19-21; etc.
2. Only one way to heaven through Christ – Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12
3. The New Testament church and its unique ministry, ordinances and mission – Mt. 16:18; 18:15-20; Acts 2:41-42; etc.
4. The virgin birth of Christ
5. The Triune nature of God
6. The dual nature of Christ
7. Etc.

These are some absolute essentials that characterize the necessary differences between Biblical Christianity and predicted

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apostate Christianity and other world religions that “must” characterize all true churches of Christ.

Finally, give consideration to the final principle or the preservation of those things essential for Christians to know and preserve the first two principles already described above. These are things that God promises that will never fail, but “*must*” continue until Christ returns or else New Testament Christianity ceases to exist. For example, the inspiration, final authority and preservation of God’s Word! God promises to preserve his word throughout all generations. If God did not preserve His word throughout all generations there would be no revelation to distinguish between truth and error.

Another example is the preservation of the Great Commission until the end of the world. Christ has promised that this commission would continue “*until the end of the world*” (Mt. 28:20). The Great Commission provides the necessary pattern for producing and defining true “*disciples*” of Christ. It provides the true nature of our mission till Jesus comes.

Another example of this final principle is the unique characteristics of the New Testament church with its qualified ministry, qualified ordinances and qualified mission which are promised to endure throughout all ages (Eph. 3:21; Mt. 16:18). This provides the necessary pattern to define what exactly is a New Testament congregation.

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D. The Great Commission Promise – “*and lo, I will be with you always, even until the end of the world, Amen*”

Thus far, we have seen there is; (1) *the Great Commission Goal*; (2) *the Great Commission Process* to reach that goal; and now we come to (3) *the Great Commission Promise* found in the final clause of Matthew 28:20

Literally, this phrase reads “*and lo, I will be with you **all the days, even until the end of the age, Amen***”

This divine promise directed solely to the contextual authorized administrator of this commission identified by the pronouns “*ye....you.*” This “*ye...you*” has already been through this commission process, as Jesus clearly says “***I HAVE commanded you***”. Hence, at the very minimum, he is addressing “*disciples*” or those of like faith and order with himself in the very essentials of this commission (same gospel, same baptism, same faith and order). This same assembly is described in Acts 1:21-22 and included more than the twelve apostles, because it is out of this traveling assembly there were chosen others to be considered as replacements for Judas. This is the early church at Jerusalem that Jesus instituted and commanded to assemble and wait for the promise of the Father (Acts 1:5; 2:1), and unto which three thousand new believers were “*added unto them*” (Acts 2:40) identified as the church (Acts 2:46).

This is a promise of church perpetuity through administration of the Great Commission reproducing after its own kind until Jesus comes again at the end of the age.

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1. Perpetuity stated: The words “*all the days until the end of age*” (lit. Greek translation) are inclusive of “*all the days*” without gaps or “*day in and day out*” as one prominent Reformed Greek scholar translated it.

2. Organic Link to Link Perpetuity: Actual contact must occur between the administrator (“*ye*”) and the objects of this commission (“*them*”). It is impossible to administer this commission without actual organic contact between the administrators and those being disciplined. This is easily seen in the administration of baptism, as organic contact is required to administer baptism. This is equally seen in teaching them to observe all things commanded as some of the things commanded require mutual membership in the same congregation (Mt. 18:15-17; Mt. 26:12-30; etc.).

3. Natural Cycle of Perpetuity: The participles of the commission form a natural cycle of Perpetuity. The orderly process is (1) go evangelize; then (2) baptize; and then (3) instruct them to observe all things commanded which is inclusive of the first command to “go” evangelize. Thus it is a natural reproductive cycle that self-initiates from the beginning all over again in a continuous process.

This natural cycle is seen in all denominations. Whenever a denomination has originated from some man, this process is started that perpetuates that denomination from the time it was started. Christ started a church that produces after its own kind long before other men built such institutions and its has perpetuated itself from the ministry of Christ until the present time, just as Lutheran’s

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have perpetuated themselves through a similar cycle that began with the ministry of Martin Luther.

4. Supernatural Cycle of Perpetuity: This reproductive cycle of like faith and order originated by Christ in his ministry cannot fail to perpetuate itself “*all the days until the end of the age*” because Jesus promised that He would be with this KIND of church “day in and day out” reproducing after its own kind until He returns.

We can see this with the Lutheran kind of church. The Lutheran kind of church has been reproducing after its own kind for nearly 500 years without Luther’s presence. The Roman Catholic Church has been reproducing after its own kind for nearly 1500 years since the time of Constantine when the union of church and state originated without the presence of Constantine. How much more the original kind of churches that was established in the first century.

Christ never commissioned anyone to produce a **different kind** of disciple than His kind. Professed “disciples” who are replicated after another kind of pattern are not **His kind** of disciples, but are what the scriptures warn, and define to be a “*heretic*”, or those who “*depart from the faith*” (1 Tim. 6:1; 2 Thes. 3:6). Such can be true Christians or a “brother” (1 Cor. 5:11; 2 Thes. 3:6 “*a brother*”). Christ never commissioned anyone to go preach “*another*” kind of gospel or administer another kind of baptism or teach another kind of system of doctrine and practice, as to do so is to reproduce another kind of disciple, other than what Jesus commissioned to be made.

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Any church that preaches “*another gospel*” cannot possibly be a true church of Christ, as all those who preach “*another*” gospel are specifically and explicitly condemned as “*accursed*” by Paul (Gal. 1:8-9).

Any church that administers *another* baptism cannot possibly be a true church of Christ, as all who reject this commissioned baptism reject the counsel of God (Lk. 7:29-30). No unbaptized group of persons can be recognized as a true church of Christ, because the New Testament knows of no such churches comprised of unbaptized members. If the baptism administered by a church is not the same kind of baptism Jesus submitted to, administered to others (Jn. 3:1-2) and commissioned, then such are still unbaptized and in need of *scriptural* baptism by a *scriptural* administrator.

Any church that teaches another faith and order than what Christ commanded is specifically and explicitly condemned by Paul (1 Tim. 4:1).

Any church that originates from another source than like faith and order with Christ is not a true church of Christ. For example, Christ never authorized “*the nations*” or those identified as “*them*” to administer any aspect of this commission. What Christ instituted in the commission is like kind, reproducing like kind. True New Testament Churches are originated/constituted by previous existing churches of like faith and order. *New Testament* Churches do not evolve or self-produce themselves, but are reproduced after their own kind.

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E. What are the Great Commission Essentials that identify a True Church?

We have provided five Great Commission essentials to distinguish New Testament congregations from false churches:

1. **The great Commission focus/goal** “*make disciples*” – reproducing LIKE FAITH AND ORDER
2. **The Great Commission process/pattern** to follow – (going with the gospel, baptizing believers, assembling them to be taught how to observe all things).
3. **The Great Commission Boundary** – “*whatsoever things I have commanded.*” – same gospel, same baptism, same faith and order.

These three participles (“*go*,” “*baptizing*,” and “*teaching*”) obtain the goal of this commission, which is to reproduce “*disciples*”, or those of like faith and order with Christ. Omit any of these three aspects and it is impossible to replicate disciples as commanded by Christ. Hence, disciples cannot be made any way you please, but through this authorized three step pattern provided by the builder of the church. However, not just any gospel, not any baptism or any faith and practice can achieve that goal or some other kind of disciple is produced, and therefore, some other kind of church is produced. Only by following the Biblical pattern for making “disciples” within the guidelines of “*whatsoever I have commanded you*” produces true “disciples” and true churches of Christ. The end results are “disciples” that are like faith and order within the boundaries of these three participles (same gospel, same baptism, same faith and order).

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4. The Great Commission Administrator – An already existing disciplined plural “*ye*” of like faith and order or the New Testament congregation, as it is impossible to be a “*disciple*” in the process described, and operate outside the membership of such a congregation – Acts 2:40-41.

5. The Great Commission Promise of Perpetuity – New Testament churches do not self-originate but are products of a promised Great Commission cycle of reproduction after their own kind. True churches are the product of a previous existing church of like faith and order carrying out the Great Commission.

Conclusion

All true churches of Jesus Christ have at least these five minimal essentials. They preach the **same** gospel that Jesus preached (Jn. 3:16; Gal. 1:8-13). They administer the **same** baptism Jesus submitted to and administered (Mt. 3:15-17; Jn. 4:1-2). They teach the **same** faith and order that Jesus commanded (Jude 3; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Thes. 2:15; 3:6). They also originate from the **same** commissioned source “*Ye*” that are like faith and order. And finally, they do not self-originate but are reproduced from a preexisting church of like faith and order within a promised reproductive cycle of perpetuity. Find a church that originates from this pattern, and which follows this pattern and you have found a true New Testament congregation.

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The Great Apostate Doctrine

Christ, and the writers of the New Testament predicted there would be a great apostasy, and those seeds of apostasy would begin in the apostolic age, and eventually constitute the majority of professed Christianity. Jesus predicted this in the parable of the tares in Matthew 13 and inferred it in Luke 18:8. Paul predicted this several times (2 Tim. 3:1-13; 2 Thes. 2:9-13; 1 Tim. 4:1). Indeed, the earliest Anabaptists used these very same scriptures when confronted by the dominate churches in their time.²

However, more importantly, the apostle Paul predicted precisely how this apostasy would originate, and with whom it would originate:

² The great Lutheran church historian Augustus Neander recorded the response of the 4th century Donatists to the charge by the Catholics that if they alone constituted the true apostolic churches then Christ's churches would be a very small number indeed, "*When the church, however widely extended, - they inferred, - became corrupted by intercourse with unworthy members, then that church, in whatever nook or corner of the earth it might be, which had no manifestly vicious members within its pale, is the genuinely catholic one. They appealed, not without reason, from the prejudgment grounded on a numbers and universality, to the passages of Scripture where the little band of genuine confessors was distinguished from the great mass of apostates, or of those belonging to the kingdom of God merely in outward appearance; as, for example, the seven thousand that had not bowed the knee to Baal, - where the few, who went in the straight way towards heaven, were opposed to the multitude of those who went in the broad way to destruction. They maintained that when Christ represented it as so doubtful (Lk. 18:8), whether at his reappearance he should find faith on the earth, this indicated that the faithful, in the true sense, would not be thus disffused in one mass over the whole earth.*" - Dr. Augustus Neander, **General History of the Christian Religion and Church**, Crocker and Brewster, 1872, Volume 2, p. 243

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For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. – Acts 20:29-30

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple. – Rom. 16:17-18

It would originate from false teachers coming into New Testament churches from the outside, and from apostate leadership within leading away members to form new churches. Here is how other denominations would arise. They would arise by “*speaking perverse things*” that were “*contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned*” which then would cause a split in the churches “*to draw away disciples after them.*” Then such disciples after being drawn “*away*” from the churches by these false teachers would assemble with these false teachers producing another kind of church, which would begin a process of producing churches of like faith and order, and thus a new denomination would be founded. This very thing began to occur within the second century.

Christ and the apostles not only predicted such an apostasy, but also gave precise instructions for dealing with it. Such apostasy within churches was to be dealt with by the doctrine and practice of church discipline (Mt. 18:15-18; 1 Cor. 5:6-13; 2 Thes. 3:6, 14; Rom. 16:17-18). Church discipline was designed to remove

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leavened members out of the membership, and thus protect the churches from going into apostasy.

Jesus speaking to the seven churches of Asia reminded them of their responsibility to deal with such members within their churches:

*I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and **thou hast tried them** which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: - Rev. 2:2*

***But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them** that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. **So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans**, which thing I hate. Hence, it was over the doctrine of church discipline that the first great division occurred between post-apostolic churches.
– Rev. 2:14-15*

However, it is this very defense mechanism built into the churches (church discipline) that was attacked between the second and fourth centuries. There was a large group of churches that failed to practice church discipline, and as a result, were polluted within by false doctrines, lost professors and worldliness. As a consequence, those churches which continued to practice church discipline refused to accept the ordinances and members from those churches which did not. They examined anyone coming from such churches and rebaptized them. Hence, the worldly polluted congregations called them “Anabaptists” or re-baptizers.

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This issue came to a climax during the great persecutions of the churches by the various Roman Emperors. When the churches were under persecution, many would renounce Christ in order to avoid persecution or martyrdom, but when the persecution ceased, these renouncers wanted to be received back into the congregations they had renounced. The very same ones would then renounce Christ again when the next persecution occurred. Hence, those churches that practiced church discipline refused to receive them back. However, there were a great number of other churches which did receive them back and which ceased to practice church discipline. As a result they became leavened with different false doctrines. It was among these polluted churches that those disciplined by other churches sought refuge and were accepted into their membership. When those churches which did not practice church discipline received disciplined members there began a breach among the churches, as the churches which practiced church discipline disfellowshipped and renounced the ordinances administered by churches which received such disciplined members. Why? Church discipline was regarded as an essential doctrine in order to continue as a true New Testament church,³ because without it, it would become “*corrupted*” and thus a metaphorical “*harlot*” church instead of a church that had been “*espoused*” as a metaphorical “*virgin*” to Christ:

³ “*The Donatists maintained that the church should cast out from its body those who were known, by open and manifest sins, to be unworthy members.....When the church did not act in accordance with these rules, said they, but tolerated such unworthy members in her communion, she lost the predicates of purity and holiness.*” Dr. Augustus Neander, **General History of the Christian Religion and Church**, Crocker and Brewster, 1872, Volume 2, p. 241

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For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel.... – 2 Cor. 11:2-4

Early in the fourth century this essential corruption came to a climax when Constantine adopted Christianity as the new state religion.

Constantine, a recent convert of the undisciplined and polluted type of churches wanted to reconcile this breach between churches, and so asked all the churches in the Roman Empire to send their representatives to Rome to discuss the issue. Over 500 pastors showed up.⁴ Around 279 came from those churches later called “Donatists.” They rejected that the Emperor had any authority over them, although they were willing to discuss the issue. Augustine of Hippo in Northern Africa led the other 286 plus pastors that represented the liberal churches in this debate over the issue of church discipline. The issue finally settled down to the interpretation of Matthew 13 and the parable of the tares.⁵

⁴ “There met together at Carthage, A.D. 411, two hundred and eighty-six bishops of the Catholics, and two hundred seventy-nine of the Donatist party.” – Dr. Augustus Neander, **General History of the Christian Religion and Church**, Crocker and Brewster, 1872, Volume 2, p. 237

⁵ “The Catholic party appealed to those parables of our Lord which treat of the separation of the good and bad, reserved unto final judgment; the parables of

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Augustine redefined the nature of the church to be extensive as “*the kingdom of God*” in order to repudiate the doctrine of church discipline. In the parable of the tares the Lord commanded the angels not to root up the tares from out of the field, which he defined as “*the world*” (not the church). However, Augustine demanded the church was as extensive as “*the world*” or the professing “*kingdom of God*” throughout the world including both tares and the true seed. In so doing he argued that the church was not to remove such from their membership or condemn those churches which did not practice church discipline. He redefined the “church” to be “universal” in addition to being visible and equated the church, as extensive as the Roman Empire under Constantine, and thus the church concept inclusive of the secular state. Thus, Augustine invented the union of church state or marriage of one world government and one world church. This state church concept later was initially embraced by Reformation denominations (Lutherans, Presbyterians, Reformed, etc.). All of the churches that did not practice church discipline followed Augustine in this new definition of the “church” and thus a new kind of church was given birth of the Holy Roman Catholic Church or the universal visible Church of Rome.

Significantly, prior to this debate none of the 500 plus pastors professed any other belief than in a local visible congregation as

*the tares and the wheat, - of the draught of fishes. The Donatists replied, either that these passages referred simply to the mixing together of the good and bad in the **world**, and not within the church; that by the **field**, the **net**, was to be understood, not the church, but the world...*” - Dr. Augustus Neander, **General History of the Christian Religion and Church**, Crocker and Brewster, 1872, Volume 2, p. 242

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the apostolic “church.” The term “catholic” was used only to affirm two things; (1) Universal recognition of one apostolic faith and practice; (2) Membership that extended to all races, classes and genders in distinction to the Jewish “*house of God*” that did not afford equal standing for women or Gentiles with Jewish males. Each and every New Testament church was termed as an “Apostolic catholic church” in this sense. However, with Augustine the term “Catholic” took on a new meaning of a “universal” organization with one government that united the state and the church at Rome.

When Augustine proposed this new concept of the church, those churches *later* identified as “Donatists” (a derisive term) charged Augustine and the churches that followed him with inventing a second kind of church and thus two churches; (1) the apostolic model of a visible local institution; (2) the Augustinian model of a universal visible state church.⁶

Between Augustine and Martin Luther only these two competing models can be found in Church history.⁷ Those who embraced only the apostolic model were called “heretics” or “Anabaptists” while

⁶ “*In this way they furnished occasion to the Donatists of charging them with supposing the existence of two churches*” - Dr. Augustus Neander, **General History of the Christian Religion and Church**, Crocker and Brewster, 1872, Volume 2, p. 246

⁷ Many believed in a yet future glory church not yet assembled, but would be assembled in heaven after the judgment consisting of all the elect of all ages. This is not to be confused with the Reformation Protestant concept of a universal invisible church which demands the present existence of a church now on earth and in heaven consisting of all the elect.

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those who embraced the Augustinian model were called the Holy Roman Catholic Church.

However, by the time of Martin Luther, the problem of church discipline arose anew within the Roman Catholic Church. Rome had excommunicated the Reformers and thus robbed them of their salvation, as Rome believed then, as it does now, that salvation is in the church and outside the church there is no salvation.

Therefore, having been excommunicated, the Reformers, especially Martin Luther and John Calvin revisited Augustine's definition of church based on his interpretation that the church and "*the world*" were coextensive or the "*kingdom of God*." He simply added another spectrum to the Augustinian doctrine of a universal church, or the word "invisible," and thus created a third definition of the church previously unknown in the 1500 years prior to the Reformation. Since, he too, believed salvation is in the church and outside the church is no salvation; he expanded the concept of the church to be both "universal" and "invisible" but including only the saved. He denied that any earthly emperor or pope could add, or subtract from the universal invisible church, thereby, absolving the Reformers from excommunication by the Roman Catholic Church.

However, the Anabaptists, who were the current representatives of the ancient Donatists, charged Luther with the same error the Donatists charged Augustine with – inventing another kind of church.

In both cases, Augustine and the reformers were attempting to invalidate the Biblical doctrine of church discipline using the same

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text (Mt. 13). However, the Donatists and later Anabaptists pointed out that the field containing both tares and true seed was called “*the world*” by Christ containing both the true “seed” and the professing “tares” as the “*kingdom of God.*” The Reformation Anabaptists, as did the former Donatist Anabaptist, denied Christ was speaking about the church or church discipline.

In both cases, a brand new type of church was introduced that invalidated church discipline, thus allowing within the membership of these churches what the Lord forbid to remain in the membership of local visible churches. Thus, what Augustine and Luther claimed to be the real “true” church consisted of the very kind of members that the Lord demanded should be removed from apostolic local churches by church discipline.

However, the Reformers still embraced the concept of a “universal visible” state church in addition to their new found “invisible” church. Thus, the church of Germany was Lutheranism, the Church of England was Episcopalianism, the Church of Scotland was the Reformed church, and etc.

Both the Donatists and Anabaptists called the Roman Catholic Church and the Reformed Roman Catholic church “*the Great Whore and her daughters*” and rejected their new doctrines of the church, as well as their churches as New Testament congregations.

The Protestant Reformer Henry Bullinger confirms the fact that these apostolic churches rejected both Protestant and Catholic churches and their ordinances when he says of them:

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The Anabaptists think themselves to be the only true church of Christ, and acceptable to God; and teach that they, who by baptism are received into their churches, ought not to have communion [fellowship] with [those called] evangelical, or any other whatsoever: for that our-[i.e., evangelical Protestant, or reformed] churches are not true churches, any more than the churches of the Papists.” - J.R. Graves, **Old Landmarkism What Is It?** (Reprint by Calvary Baptist Church Book Shop, Ashland, KY) p. 115

Since the time of Augustine, only those called “Anabaptists” by their Roman Catholic foes maintained the true Biblical concept of the New Testament church in keeping with the Great Commission principles of churches of “like faith and order” reproduced after their own kind. They repudiated all the churches that followed Augustine, Luther and Calvin and regarded them as “heretics” and apostates from the New Testament faith and practice.

The Roman Catholic and Reformed concepts of the “church” are doctrines designed to allow apostates to remain within church membership. They are doctrines designed to repudiate the Biblical doctrines of the church and church discipline. Thus, the “universal visible” and “universal invisible” concepts of the church are demonic doctrines that validate the existence of the Great Whore and her apostate Reformation “harlots.”

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A Biblical View of Secular Church History

The epistles are primarily written to local visible churches or members (“*ye*”) in such churches. The contextual “*we*” of the New Testament books are members of churches of *like faith and order*. Hence, there is but “*one*” body in kind and in number, as well as “*one*” baptism in kind and number. It is the *same kind* of metaphorical congregational “*body*” found at every other geographical location where epistles were addressed (1 Cor. 12:27a; Rev. 2-3). It is the *same kind* of water baptism administered to all the “*members in particular*” (1 Cor. 12:27b; Rev. 2-3; Mt. 28:19-20) that make up each congregational body of Christ. It is “*one*” congregational body in number where each reader of the epistle was individually located and a member. It is the “*one*” water baptism that each reader had submitted unto.

There can be no debate that New Testament churches were fully functioning long before Luke penned the final pages of the book of Acts. There are no accounts of any other denominational kind of churches. All churches found in the pages of the New Testament were of *like faith and order*, and therefore, the historical writers and audience of New Testament epistles (“*we...us...ye...you*”) were all like faith and order, or what we would recognize today as the same denomination of churches.

However, when one picks up a modern secular book on “church history” there is nothing found in such books for at least fifteen hundred years after the close of the apostolic era that even comes close to resembling those churches found in the pages of the New Testament. During that fifteen hundred year period, the only kind of church that stands out on the pages of secular church history is the Roman Catholic Church and those whom Rome persecuted and depicted as heretics.

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Even though there is a radical and profound difference in the theology between modern Rome and the epistle written to the New Testament church at Rome, the vast majority of secular and religious historians assume they are one and the same.

Even prominent protestant leaders such as Dr. John MacArthur and Dr. R.C. Sproul, when they speak of the Roman Catholic Church during the period of the Dark Ages, call it “**The Church.**” The current host of the syndicated radio program The Bible Answer Man, Hank Hannegraff, as well as its former host Dr. Walter Martin, espouses the idea that the Roman Catholic Church is the true apostolic church until the Reformation period, and even now continues to be “**a**” true church of Christ in error.

However, what evidence supports this assumption? From what sources can this assumption be supported? It is common knowledge that the writing and preservation of ecclesiastical records up to the Reformation period have been solely in the hands of Rome.⁸ She has determined what should be preserved and what

⁸ “The original sources of our information are, almost exclusively, the Catholic writers – a race of men who, while they had an interest in disguising the truth, appear to have delighted themselves in culminating all that dissented themselves from their communion. And even since the Reformation....our Protestant historians have been but too implicitly led by those false guides. There is scarcely any history of the Christian Church extant in our language from which it would not be easy to exemplify the truth of this representation...But with any man with his eyes open, and capable of exercising two grains of discrimination, should have first of all permitted himself to be so far imposed upon by the Catholic writers, as to give credit to such a tissue of absurd and ridiculous fooleries, and then gravely to detail them to his readers for the truth of history, is at once a striking weakness of the author, and of the necessity of exercising continual vigilance on the part of the reader, if he would neither become the dupe of Papal slander, nor of Protestant credulity.” William Jones, *The History of the Christian Church*. (Louisville: Norwood & Palmer, 1831) Vol. I, Preface.

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should be destroyed. She has defined what orthodoxy is, and what heresy is, and who are to be regarded as “heretics.”⁹

The question must be asked, how credible is her testimony and how accurate are her definitions? How accurate are her records? Not all scholars completely trust her definition of orthodoxy or the reliability of her records. There have been many historians from many denominations, including some candid Roman Catholic historians that view the data preserved by Rome in a completely different light.¹⁰ Many of them realize that unlike the Scriptures, secular history is; (1) uninspired, thus subject to personal bias;¹¹ (2) incomplete; and (3) often inaccurate.¹² These historians believe that

⁹ “Church councils often have been manipulated and ecclesiastical tradition has been falsified to give credence to some teaching entirely unknown to the New Testament.” Robert A. Baker, **The Baptist March in History** (Nashville: Convention Press, 1958) p. 2

¹⁰ “The Catholics...instead of assuming such honorable pride, the orthodox theologians were tempted, by the assurance of impunity to compose fictions, which must be stigmatized with epithets of fraud and forgery. They ascribed their own polemical works to the most venerable names of Christian antiquity; the characters of Athanasius and Augustine were awkwardly personated by Vigilus and his disciples....Even the Scriptures themselves were profaned by their rash hands...the example of fraud must cite suspicion.” Edward Gibbons, **The Decline and Fall of The Roman Empire**. (New York: Peter Fenelon Collier. 1845) Vol. 3, pp. 555,556,557

¹¹ “No men are less to be trusted than the monkish historians, when they speak of the character and doctrine of dissidents from Rome.” Benjamin Evans. **The Early English Baptists**, (Greenwood: The Attic Press, Reprint 1977) Vol. 1, p. 13

¹² “...no impartial reader can, I think, investigate the innumerable grotesque and lying legends that, during the whole course of the Middle Ages, were deliberately palmed upon mankind as undoubted facts, can follow the histories of the false decretals, and the discussions that were connected with them, or can observe the complete and absolute incapacity most Catholic historians have

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Rome has unintentionally preserved sufficient historical data to demonstrate that apostolic Christianity continued among those whom she labeled and treated as **heretics**. Indeed, some identify those “*heretics*” with apostolic Christianity, who are prophetically predicted to be characterized as “*heretics*” between His first and Second Advent.

Is it a fair question to ask if the Bible predicts that apostate Christianity would characterize the apostolic true churches of Christ as “*heretics*”? Does the Bible predict that apostate Christianity would distort and persecute apostolic churches until He comes again? If it does, all one has to do is compare these predictive scriptures with the character of all churches found in secular church history to see which, if any, are the Lord’s true apostolic churches.

The Bible clearly predicts an apostate Christianity will arise in direct contrast to the characteristics of true apostolic New Testament Churches. In essence, the Bible warns us where we ought not to look for the Lord’s true churches between the close of the Apostolic Age and the Second Coming of Christ.

A. Don’t look among Churches who persecute

These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the

displayed, of conceiving any good thing in the ranks of their opponents, or stating with common fairness any consideration that can tell against their cause, without acknowledging how serious and how inveterate has been the evil. There have been, no doubt many noble exceptions. Yet, it is, I believe difficult to exaggerate the extent to which this moral defect exists in most of the ancient and very much of the modern literature of Catholicism.” William E. H. Lecky, **History of European Morals**. 2 Vols. (New York: D. Appleton & Co. 1887) Vol. 2, p. 212

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synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me. - Jn. 16:1-3 (emphasis mine)

And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration. - Rev. 17:6

These are predictive prophecies concerning the future of the Lord's churches and their persecutors. Significantly, Jesus predicts that those who persecute the Lord's churches during that period, after the close of the Biblical era, will believe they are serving the one true God, in killing them.

...that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. - Jn.16:2 (emphasis mine)

At the very minimum, this is clearly a Biblical prophecy that should warn us not to look for the true churches of Christ among those who persecute professed people of God in the name of God.

It does not take much study of secular church history to realize that the Roman Catholic Church perfectly characterizes this kind of persecuting Christianity. At the very beginning when the Roman Catholic Church was being formed the Donatists asked:

Did the apostles ever persecute anyone, or did Christ ever deliver any one over to the secular power? Christ commands us to flee persecutors, Matth. 10:23. Thou who callest thyself a disciple of Christ oughtest not to imitate the evil deeds of the heathens. Think you thus to serve

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God, - by destroying us with your own hand? - Dr. Augustus Neander, **General History of the Christian Religion and Church**, Crocker and Brewster, 1872, Volume 2, p. 242

It does not take much study of the Reformation period right up until the declaration of Independence in America, to realize that both Roman and Reformed Catholicism (Protestantism) killed, and persecuted one another. In addition, both at times, joined forces and persecuted professed Christians, who were neither part of them, or took part in such acts of persecution.

Where then do you look for His true churches? You don't look among those known for their persecution of other professed Christians. You look among those whom Rome and Reformed Rome martyred and persecuted, as "heretics." This is the inspired predicted plight of the true churches of Christ during this time of these last days of apostasy. Their history is traced by the trail of blood of their martyrs.

B. Don't look among State Churches

*And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: **With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication**, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication. So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked*

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with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. - Rev. 17:1-5 (emphasis mine)

Many attempt to interpret this prophetic woman as merely secular and political Rome, but that is contextually impossible. In Revelation 17:1-5, the symbolic descriptions are stated, whereas in Revelation 17:6-18, the symbolic descriptions are explained. In both the symbolic description, and explanation, she is clearly distinguished from secular government and kings:

With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication. – Rev. 17:2

And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast... and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled. – Rev. 17:12, 17

The description “*beast*” is a common symbol for gentile governments. In Daniel such beasts are characteristic of secular governments and their rulers (Dan. 7). Her relationship to this beast is two-fold.

1. She sits upon it – Symbolism of being supported by the beast (secular governments).

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2. She commits fornication with the kings of the earth
– Symbolism of illicit union – marriage of state and religion – state religion

Furthermore, she is a symbolic woman identified as “*Mystery Babylon.*” The term “*mystery*” when attached to “*Babylon*” commonly referred to the paganized religions that originated from Babel. Babel was the first organized institutionalized religious rebellion against God. Nimrod took the truth of God written in the heavens, and transformed it into astrology, and perverted the nature of the Creator into that of the creature, making himself a god man. When God confused, and scattered the citizens of Babel, this “*mystery*” religion was scattered throughout the world. She is state institutionalized false religion.

She has been the state religion of every gentile government that has risen previous to Rome (Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Medes and Persians, Greece). This harlot has controlled and manipulated every one of these former gentile governments in order to persecute and kill the people of God. Hence, John could say, she was responsible not only for the death of all the prophets and the saints “*upon the earth,*” but responsible for deceiving all the nations:

for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived. And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth. –
Rev. 18:23-24 (emphasis mine)

The Babylonian mystery religion had its seat of power in the city of Rome at the time John wrote this vision (Rev. 17:18). She was epitomized in Caesar, who was worshipped as a god man. John was on the island of Patmos, because he refused to offer up

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incense, dedicated to this deity of Rome. The secular state of Rome was inseparable from mystery Babylonian religion – a state church.

However, John’s message is concerning the future of this harlot. She will be destroyed by ten kings, who had not come to power when John wrote this, nor will they come to power, until just previous to the second coming of Christ.

And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast... and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled. – Rev. 17:12, 17

She is not destroyed, until the time of these ten kings after they receive a kingdom. They destroy her, when they come to power “*with the beast*” for “*one hour*,” when He attempts to fight Christ at the Second Advent.

These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast. These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful. – Rev. 17:13-14

Rome, as a secular government was overthrown in AD 476, and since that time Vatican State has been the power of Rome in the world. Therefore, the only government existing in Rome both before, and at the time of the Second Advent, when these ten future kings unite with the beast to fight Christ, is the Vatican Roman Catholic Church State.

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John is predicting the future of this Harlot in connection with the churches of God. Notice the direct contrast between this woman in Revelation 17-18, and another woman in Revelation 19 and 21! The first, is described as a metaphorical impure, and unfaithful woman (Rev. 17:5 harlot, whore), while the second is described as a metaphorically pure and faithful woman or bride (Rev 19:6-7). The first has its seat of authority in an earthly worldly city (Rev. 17:18), whereas the second has her seat of authority in the heavenly city (Rev. 21). The impure woman has true children of God within her (Rev. 18:4) while the pure woman has true children of God outsider of her (Rev. 19:8-9; 21:24). The contrast is too clear to miss. This is the ultimate contrast between polluted and pure institutionalized religion, right up to the second advent of Christ.

This Babylonian mystery cult had captivated, and permeated the whole Roman Empire, long before Constantine the Great came to power in the fourth century. Long before Constantine came to power, there were many churches that took in massive amounts of members, still clinging to the traditions, and beliefs of this Great Harlot. Slowly, multitudes of churches were permeated, and leavened into an apostate condition by this harlot.

During the time of Constantine the Great, the Roman Empire was beginning to crumble. Constantine rejected the apostolic churches that would have nothing to do with those paganized churches, or with any institutionalized state religion. Constantine embraced the apostate Augustine, and the paganized churches, that sided with him, to form the new state church religion. Constantine hoped this merger would prevent the collapse of the Roman Empire.

Dear reader, take note that the origin of a state church is not to be found in the New Testament, but with paganized Christianity,

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three hundred years after the writing of the New Testament. Here is the beginning of an institutionalized Christian State religion. The apostate Augustine formulated the theological foundations (The City of God) to support this Christianized Babylonian state religion. In declaring it the new state religion, all citizens in the Roman Empire were to become part of this Christianized Babylonian state religion, just as they had done with the previous pagan Babylonian state religion. The very character of the religious order adopted by Roman Catholicism comes directly from Mystery Babylon:

*The College of Cardinals, with the Pope at its head, is just the counterpart of the Pagan College of Pontiffs, with its 'Pontifex Maximus,' or 'Sovereign Pontiff,' which had existed in Rome from the earliest times, and which is known to have been framed on the model of the grand original Council of Pontiffs at Babylon. – Alexander Hislop, **The Two Babylons or The Papal Worship**. Loizeaux Brothers, New Jersey, 1959, p. 206*

In the Mystery Babylon religion, can be found **Pontiff's**, **monks**, **priests**, and **Cardinals**, but no such offices are to be found anywhere in the New Testament. Roman Catholicism would continue to adopt and develop the doctrines, and practices of Mystery Babylon, under Christianized names for the next one thousand years.

This Great Whore would produce a brood of offspring, Christianized "*harlots*," all of which would also be state churches. All of them would continue to practice Christianized Babylonian doctrines (infant baptism, sacraments, etc.).

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And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration. - Rev. 17:5

Some of these “harlots” or state churches are:

1. Lutheranism - The Church of Germany
2. Presbyterianism - The Church of Scotland;
The Church of Switzerland
3. Episcopalian - The Church of England
4. The Reformed Church - The Church of Holland

We are not to look for apostolic Christianity among any kind of state church, or religion. Such, is an unholy union (harlotry – *“fornication with the kings of the earth”*). This Biblical prophecy rules out Rome and her Reformation daughters, as possible candidates to be New Testament churches. Where are we to look then? We are to look among those condemned for refusing to join this unholy union between church and state. Those identified by state churches, as “heretics.”

C. Don’t look among those churches which embrace predicted apostate doctrines:

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and

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commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. - 1 Tim. 4:1-5

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. - Gal. 1:8-9

Roman Catholicism is well known for prohibiting its priests and nuns to marry. Seventh Day Adventism, and other apostate Christian cults, is also well known concerning their dietary laws. There are multitudes of new denominations that distort, and thus deny the gospel of grace, and teach justification by works.

There are other equally clear scriptural warnings about those who would distort the true nature of God (John 1:1; 1 Jn. 4:1-4; 2 Jn. 9-11; Mt. 28:19). Among those who fall under this category are the United Pentecostal Churches, Jehovah's Witnesses, The Church of Latter Day Saints, and scores more.

What the apostate church called truth and orthodoxy, the Bible and apostolic Christianity calls heresy. What Roman and Reformed Catholicism condemned as heretics, the New Testament defined as the churches of Christ "*contending for the faith once delivered to the saints.*"

During the period of secular church history (the period of great apostasy), we are clearly warned not to look for the churches of Christ among those who hold to such explicitly condemned heresies. We are to look for the true churches among those who

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opposed these heresies and as a consequence were labeled “heretics” by the ruling state churches.

D. Don’t look among those who perverted and distorted the beliefs of others:

It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household? – Mt. 10:25

For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a devil. 34 The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners! - Lk. 7:33

Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man’s sake. – Lk. 6:22

Apostate Christianity at a very early date invented a slanderous term to label the true apostolic churches. They called the churches of God, **Anabaptists**. The term means to **rebaptize**. New Testament churches refused to recognize the ordinances of apostate churches, as scriptural, and therefore, would properly baptize those coming over from the apostate churches. New Testament churches denied they rebaptized anyone, but rather claimed that the apostates were never truly baptized. Rome, early on, instituted state enforced ecclesiastical laws against “Anabaptism,” punishable by death. These laws were called the *Codex Justinianus* after their founder.

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The fabrications, and slanders brought against the apostolic Anabaptists by Rome, and her Reformed daughters, are legion.¹³ When apostolic Christianity used the Bible as their defense, the inquisitors used Catholic tradition, to repudiate their orthodox beliefs, labeling them “*heretics*” instead.¹⁴

Rome accused the ancient apostolic Anabaptist Paulicians for embracing the heresy of Manicheism, even though, the Paulicians openly denied it and openly condemned Manicheism as heresy themselves.¹⁵ The ancient Anabaptists were accused of denying marriage, denying the Lord’s Day, denying observances of the ordinances, denying Christ, etc. simply because they denied the

¹³ “...The writers of that age searched out the most degrading and insulting epithets that language afforded and applied them with malignant gratification....Yet these men could appeal to those who witnessed their sufferings, and boldly declare, with the axe or the stake in view, none venturing to contradict, that they were not put to death for any evil deeds, but solely for the sake of the Gospel.” J.M. Cramp, **Baptist History**. (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication) p. 155

¹⁴ “...two heresies penalized by death in the Codex Justinianus were a denial of the trinity and a repetition of baptism. This ancient legislation directed against the Arians and Donatists was revived in the Sixteenth Century and applied to Anti-Trinitarians and Anabaptists. Luther, Melancthon, and Calvin all appealed to the imperial law...In fact, the very name ‘Anabaptist,’ meaning ‘Rebaptism,’ was invented in order to subject to imperial law those who preferred to call themselves simply Baptists. They would never admit they baptized over again, for infant baptism was to them no baptism but rather a ‘dipping in the Roman bath.’” Roland H. Bainton, **The Travail of Religious Liberty** (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1958) pp. 98-99

¹⁵ “The Paulicians sincerely condemned the memory and opinions of the Manichean sect, and complained of the injustice which impressed that invidious name on the simple votaries of St. Paul and of Christ.” Edward Gibbons, **The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire**. (New York: Peter Fenelon Collier, 1845) Vol. 5, p. 387

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Roman Catholic version of these things.¹⁶ The radical Pedobaptist (baby baptizers) led by Thomas Munzer in Germany were labeled Anabaptists by the Lutheran State Church in order to exterminate all evangelical Anabaptists by the thousands, even though, it was well known the Munsterites were Pedobaptist, and not Anabaptists. Anabaptists condemned the Munsterites as heretics and denied such were ever part of the true Anabaptist movement, but that mattered little to the Lutheran or Roman Catholic state churches.

It is this kind of distortion, false accusations by the ruling State Churches that defined the Anabaptists as “heretics” and led modern historians to view them through the eyes of their enemies instead of the truth.¹⁷

¹⁶ William Jones says of the Waldenses, “The names imposed on them in France by their adversaries, they say, have been intended to vilify and ridicule them, or to represent them as new and different sects. Being stripped of all their property and reduced by persecution to extreme poverty, they have been called ‘poor of Lyons.’ From their mean and famished appearance in their exalted and destitute state, they have been called, in provincial jargon, ‘Siccan,’ or pickpockets. Because they would not observe Saints day, they were falsely supposed to neglect the Sabbath also, and called ‘Inzabbatati’ or ‘InSabbathists.’ As they denied transubstantiation or the personal and divine presence of Jesus Christ in the host or wafer exhibited in the mass, they were called ‘Arians.’ Their adversaries, premising that all power must be derived from God through his vicegerent, the Pope, or from an opposite and evil principle, inferred that the Waldenses were ‘Manicheans’ because they denied the Pope’s supremacy over the emperor and kings of the earth.” William Jones, **The History of the Christian Church**, (Norwood & Plamer, Louisville: 1831) p. 300

¹⁷ “Because of this malignant prejudice, the historians of the day dismissed these groups without attempting to gain a documentary understanding or an objective judgment. This prejudging and condemnation of the Free Church movement has been carried on even in later times, a truth illustrated by subsequent Protestant historical accounts of the Anabaptists in the time of the Reformation. Only in recent years has a serious research attempt been made among historians to reconstruct a true picture of the Anabaptist movement.” Earl D. Rachmacher, **What the Church Is All About** (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978) p. 67

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We are not to look for the Lord's churches among those who slandered, distorted and falsely accused others. Where are we to look then? We are to look for the Lord's true churches among those who are slandered as the "heretics" by such state churches.

E. Don't Look Among the so-called Church Fathers

Few if any evangelical scholars recognize The Nicene Church Fathers and The Post-Nicene Church Fathers as true representatives of New Testament Christianity. Why? Because they are so radically different from New Testament churches, and so obviously like modern Roman Catholicism. Rather, they rightly see these preserved documents to accurately reflect the doctrinal evolution of Roman Catholicism.¹⁸ However, most cannot see that **The Ante-Nicene Church Fathers** are the logical historical foundations for **The Nicene** and **The Post-Nicene** record. **The**

¹⁸ ¹⁸ George Salmon says concerning the so-called Church Fathers, "And then, when we search for apostolic traditions in the writings of the Father's, there is nothing to mark their apostolic origin. We have no certain means, by our own ingenuity of distinguishing truth from false traditions, not one of the Fathers are recognized as singly trustworthy guide, every one of them is admitted to have held some views which cannot be safely followed." – **Infallibility of the Church**, George Salmon; pp. 131. The so-called Church Fathers have been selectively preserved to defend their own history – a history of apostasy.

Fredrick W. Farrar in his **History of Interpretation** said of the so-called "Church Fathers" – "There are but few of them whose pages are not rife with errors – errors of method, errors of fact, errors of history, of grammar, and even of doctrine. This is the language of simple truth, not of slighting disparagement. I should be most unwilling to speak with disrespect of the Fathers of the Church. They, like ourselves were children of their age...remember that the Fathers had been thrust into a position of autocracy which they repeatedly and emphatically disclaim, and which they ever claimed it would have been completely nullified by their own writings." – pp. 162-164

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Ante-Nicene Fathers record the beginning of apostasy that gradually developed into the Nicene and Post-Nicene Pagan form of Christianity. In **The Ante-Nicene Church Fathers** we find the origin of explicit errors of baptismal regeneration, and the gradual development of infant immersion, and various orders of ecclesiastical offices that are found explicitly in the Nicene and Post-Nicene Church Fathers, but not in the scriptures.

The Ante-Nicene Church Fathers are the history of apostasy at its very root, which laid the foundation for the Nicene and Post-Nicene development. Rome destroyed the historical and doctrinal records of all other professing Christians during this period (Montanists, Novationists, and Donatists) by the power of the secular sword! Why? Those Nicene (ante, post) records are the historical roots of what gradually developed into the Nicene and Post-Nicene Roman Catholic denomination. These writings record the historical succession of apostasy.

What is the value of **The Ante-Nicene Fathers**? When compared to **The Post-Nicene Fathers** it reveals clearly how far **The Post-Nicene Fathers** had departed from what was formerly believed and practiced. Some of the earliest Ante-Nicene fathers (**The Apostolic Fathers**) provide some insights into early Christianity. However, as one progresses in **The Ante-Nicene Fathers**, so does the progression of error until it becomes full bloom in the Post-Nicene condition of Rome.

Therefore, don't look for the true churches of Christ among **the Ant-Nicene Church Fathers**. Rome preserved these records while choosing not to preserve other records, because these records serve Rome's claim to historical succession, while helping Rome to disclaim all others as heretics or newcomers.

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F. The True History of New Testament Christianity after the Apostolic Era:

If the Roman Catholic Church is not the true representative of New Testament Christianity, then, who is? We do find them distorted but preserved in the pages of Rome's persecuting history. They are routinely identified by Roman historians as the evangelical Anabaptists. They are recorded by their trail of blood shed by Rome. Paul said, "*But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.*"

Several factors are routinely overlooked by pro-Romanists when studying what Rome recorded about those she called "*heretics.*"

False religious groups lived in the same geographical areas where true churches of Christ were also located. The reason is simply because there was religious freedom and safety found among New Testament Churches, as both true churches and false religion were all objects of state church persecution. Consequently due to geographical and social association, the true churches of Christ were labeled by the names of those heretical groups.

Another factor often overlooked is that Roman historians isolate a particular heretic and then label apostolic churches by the name of that heretic simply because there are resemblances between the two. For example, New Testament Churches believed that a true child of God possessed a new and old nature simultaneously (Gal. 5:16-19) and therefore since Manicheans also believed in two opposing forces, Rome labeled the Anabaptists as Manicheans. Another example of this confusion with other groups is that New Testament Churches believed that the membership of a church ought to be solely composed of spiritual persons who live a holy

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life and since individuals like Donatus and Montanus believed similarly, these churches were labeled Montanists and Donatists and ascribed every excess that these individual's embraced. Rome played this name game consistently throughout its recorded histories.

However, at times, Roman persecutors preserved what these Anabaptists actually believed because their faith was so obviously contrasted to that of Rome's that it provided clear evidence to subject them to the ecclesiastical laws established by Rome. Such glimmers of light revealed that true apostolic Christianity was still alive and thriving in spite of the horrid and bloody persecution by Rome.¹⁹

These evangelical Christians, many of whom, even the Roman persecutors admitted, lived pure and godly lives are painted, for the most part, in the worst of terms, in regard to their doctrines, simply due to the word of their enemies, or invalid associations. They were generally called "Anabaptists" by Rome but their reputations were perverted and distorted under such epitaphs as Montanists, Novations, Dontanists, Paulicians, Henricans, Catharists, and Waldenses. However, they preferred to call themselves simply "Baptists."

G. Where to find New Testament churches in History

Here are the groups where you look for the churches of Christ during the predicted age of apostasy under state controlled churches.

¹⁹ See **Three Witnesses for the Baptists**, by Curtis Pugh

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1. **Sir Isaac Newton** - the greatest scientist who ever lived says:

The Modern Baptist, formerly called Anabaptists, are the only people who have never symbolized with the Papacy – William Whiston, **Memoirs of Whiston**, quoted in W.A. Jarrell's **Baptist Church Perpetuity**. (Dallas, 1894), [reprinted by Calvary Baptist Book Store, Ashland, KY] p. 31

2. **John Clark Ridpath**, Methodist, author of the monumental work "Ridpath's History of the World" says,

I should not readily admit that there was a Baptist church as far back as 100 AD, though without doubt there were Baptists then, as all Christians were then Baptists.- John Clark Ridpath, personal letter to W.A. Jarrell, quoted in W.A. Jarrell's **Baptist Church Perpetuity** (Dallas, 1894), [reprinted by Calvary Baptist Church Book Store, Ashland, K.Y.], p. 59

3. **The King of Holland** appointed Dr. J.J. Dermout and Dr. Ypiej of the Reformed Church to write a history of Christianity and they say of the Baptists:

We have now seen that the Baptists, who were formerly called Anabaptists, and in later times Mennonites were the original Waldenses, and who have long in history received the honor of that origin. On this account the Baptists may be considered the only Christian community which has stood since the days of the apostles, and as a

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*Christian society which has preserved pure the doctrines of the gospel through all ages... Ypeij en Dermout, Gerschiedenis Der nederlandsche Hervormde Kerk. (Breda 1819) quoted by J.T. Christian in **A History of the Baptists** (Texarkana, AR; Bogard Press, 1922) vol. 1, pp. 95-96*

4. Mosheim, Lutheran Historian says,

*Before the rise of Luther and Calvin, there lay secreted in almost all the countries of Europe persons who adhered tenaciously to the principles of the modern Dutch Baptists – Johann Laurenze von Mosheim, **An Ecclesiastical History**, (New York, Harper & Brothers, 1860), [Reprinted by Old Paths Book Club, Box V, Rosemead, CA., Second ed.], Vol. II pp. 119,120*

5. Cardinal Hosius, Roman Catholic, Ambassador of Pope to the Council of Trent says in the year 1563 AD

For not so long ago I read the edict of the other prince who lamented the fate of the Anabaptists who, so we read, were pronounced heretics twelve hundred years ago and deserving of capital punishment. He wanted them to be heard and not taken as condemned without a hearing. (by Carolinne White, Ph.D, Oxford University, Head of

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Oxford Latin) - **Tracing the Cardinal Hosius
“Baptist” Quote** By Ben Townsend²⁰

Hosius dated the Anabaptists to at least 363 A.D.

6. Zwingli, Swiss Reformer, writing in 1525 says of the Anabaptists:

The institution of the Anabaptists is no novelty, but for THIRTEEN HUNDRED YEARS has caused great trouble to the church. – **Christian**, op cit. p. 86

Reformers Date Baptists back to 225 AD

7. Alexander Campbell, founder of the Disciples of Christ says of the Baptists;

From the Apostolic Age to the present time, the sentiments of Baptists have had a continued chain of advocates, and public monuments of their existence in every century can be produced. – Alexander Campbell, A Debate on Christian Baptism, Between the Rev. W.L. Maccalla, A Presbyterian teacher, and Alexander Campbell, (“Buffalo,” NY., Campbell and Sala, 1824) pp. 378, 379

²⁰ *Nam & alterius Principis edictum non ita pridem legi, qui vicem Anabaptistarum dolens, quos ante mille ducentos annes haeretis, capitalique supplicio dignos esse pronunciatos legimus, vult, ut audiantur omnino, nec indicta causa pro condemnatis habeantur.* (The letters of Cardinal Stanislaus Hosius, Liber Epistolarum 150, titled "Alberto Bavariae Duci" in about 1563 A.D.)

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8. Robert Barclay, a Quaker says,

*There are also reasons for believing that on the continent of Europe small hidden Christian societies, who have held many of the opinions of the Anabaptists, have existed from the time of the Apostles – Robert Barclay, **The Inner Life of the Societies of the Commonwealth.** (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1876), pp. 11, 12*

9. Roland Bainton, a Mennonite, author of “The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century” says of the Anabaptists:

*To call these people Anabaptists, that is re-baptizers, was to malign them, because they denied that baptism was repeated, inasmuch as infant baptism is no baptism at all. They called themselves simply Baptists. - Rolland Bainton, **The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century,** (Boston, Beacon Press, 1956), p. 99*

When the Reformation occurred, the Protestants joined with the Catholics in persecuting these Anabaptists. Even in America up to the introduction of the bill of rights, Protestants publicly persecuted these Anabaptists. The “**Ana**” was dropped and they became known merely as “**Baptists.**” Historical Baptists²¹ have always rebaptized all who came over from the ranks of Protestants and Catholics simply because baptism was the designated act to

²¹ Today the term “Baptist” is generic and includes more churches than the true historic and Biblical Baptists. Historic Baptists are known by their doctrinal content rather than their label. Historic Baptists are specifically known by their identity with all five aspects of the great commission.

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publicly identify a believer with the Baptist ministry (not a Catholic or Protestant ministry).

Significantly, since the time when church discipline divided apostolic churches, and those churches that practiced church discipline refused to recognize the ordinances of those churches who received disciplined members, the name **Baptist** has always been attached to those churches (Ana-Baptists, Cata-Baptists, etc.).

Today, the name **Baptist** has become a generic tag worn by many conflicting denominations which do not share either the doctrinal or historical heritage of these churches. However, it is not the name tag that defines New Testament Churches but their apostolic faith and practice as well as historical heritage that reaches back to the first church in Jerusalem.

Significantly, since the time that a denominational difference occurred among apostolic churches after the first century, the name **Baptist** has always been attached to those churches that opposed Rome (Ana-Baptists, Cata-Baptists, etc.). Today, the name **Baptist** has become a generic tag worn by many conflicting denominations which do not share either the doctrinal or historical heritage of these churches. However, it is not the name tag that defines New Testament Churches but their apostolic faith and practice as well as historical heritage that reaches back to the first church in Jerusalem.

H. Why do many modern Baptist Historians deny This?

Nearly all early Baptist historians unanimously testify to the historicity and perpetuity of the New Testament churches.

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However, many (but not all) modern Baptist historians approach historical sources through the eyes of Reformed Catholic Rome (Protestantism).²² Why? They claim that the earlier Baptist historians did not follow scientific principles of historical research, but were directed by denominational bias.

This claim began with William H. Whitsitt, the president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky at the close of the nineteenth century. He made this claim against early English Baptist historians in attempt to prove that Baptists in England began as Pedobaptists who administered baptism by sprinkling or pouring. His thesis was based upon the fact that there was no mention of immersion in the published works in England until 1644. He therefore claimed that Baptist began in 1644 from Pedobaptists who were converted to immersion of believers. He published his findings in a Pedobaptist journal.

However, he failed to recognize that Baptists prior to 1644 did not have legal freedom to express their opinions publicly and in print until the year 1644. His thesis was not only thoroughly repudiated by Dr. John T. Christian and others, but was rejected by current British Baptist historians. His claim of “scientific” historical research was rejected by the vast majority of Baptists in America and he was forced to resign.

²² Dr. Robert Ashcraft points out that German Rationalism entered the halls of academia among Baptists in the late 1800’s at Louisville Southern Baptist Seminary under the guise of the “**new historical critical method.**” This method when applied to textual criticism of the Scriptures resulted in denial of Biblical inspiration and promoted evolution. When applied to church history along with a theological bias of universalism supported the view of Reformed Romanism. - Robert Ashcraft, **Contending For the Faith.** (Baptist Sunday School Committee, Texarkana, TX. 2006) pp. 601-606

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However, those Baptist scholars who had embraced the universal invisible church theory eagerly embraced his theory then, and now and still perpetuate it today. In reality, these Baptist historians view history through the eyes of Reformed Roman Catholicism because they embrace the same theological error – the universal invisible church theory.

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EIGHT COMMON SENSE REASONS

Why

The Universal Invisible Church theory

Is a False Doctrine

1. Its theory contradicts its practice

This doctrine is commonly preached and taught to be the Biblical basis for UNIFYING God's people in actual practice. However, in reality, even though it is common that several churches embracing this doctrine are to be found in almost every city throughout this country, and yet not once, has this theory ever been able to bring such churches together as one church body/denomination even though they exist sometimes only blocks or a few miles apart. It simply does not work.

Surely if it were Biblical and if it were true, then somewhere at some time, it would achieve practical unity at least between the churches embracing that theory, which only exist within walking distance from each other in the same cities?????? In truth and in reality, it is a false doctrine that promotes only division not unity.

2. It promotes division and confusion rather than unity

Without this doctrine there would have been no basis for the excommunicated Reformers (Luther, Calvin, etc.) to respectfully call themselves churches of Christ. They would have remained simply excommunicated Roman Catholics or have had to come over to the dreaded and hated Anabaptists. This doctrine gave them a way to separate from Rome **and from each other** and has been the basis for countless numbers of such separations until this very

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day. Indeed, it is reported that there are now over 37,000 different Christian denominations in the world and five new ones are formed each week. This doctrine is the ONLY basis used for justifying the existence of each new one and thus creating further division and confusion. The character of this doctrine is seen in its only fruit – further division and disunity within Christendom. Its fruit manifests it to be a false doctrine.

3. Its Advocates cannot agree on its membership

Its advocates cannot agree among themselves who is included in this kind of church. *Dispensational* Universal Invisible advocates deny that all the saints living before Pentecost are in this church. Amazingly the distinguishing factor according to this theory is that all saints after Pentecost to the Rapture are “in Christ” and those previous to Pentecost are not “in Christ” and therefore the very gospel is attacked demanding there is another salvation OUTSIDE of Christ.

Non-dispensational Universal Invisible advocates include all the elect in all ages but then contradict themselves by interpreting I Corinthians 12:13 as “*Spirit baptism*” which they also demand is the means to enter into their kind of church, when in fact, the baptism in the Spirit had no previous existence before the day of Pentecost. They have the problem of explaining how those saints living before Pentecost could enter into this kind of church one way and those after Pentecost another way???? One false doctrine can only lead and demand more false doctrines.

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4. It includes what God commands local churches to exclude

New Testament churches are commanded to separate from any “brother” who walks disorderly (2 Thes. 3:6) or who lives in openly known sin (I Cor. 5:11) and have no fellowship with such (2 Thes. 3:14). New Testament churches are commanded to mark and avoid heretics (Rom. 16:17). However, what many refer to as the so-called “true” church embraces the very ones that New Testament Churches are commanded to separate, mark and avoid. Yet, the advocates of the universal invisible church theory claim that the local church is the visible expression of it!!

New Testament churches don’t receive into their membership unbaptized persons. However, the so-called “true” church receives unbaptized, sprinkled, poured or immersed persons into its membership. Yet its advocates claim that local churches are the visible expression of the universal invisible church!

This theory makes God the author of confusion. According to this theory what God demands for membership in *the visible expression* (local church) is *not expressed* in the membership requirements of the Universal invisible church. Only a false doctrine would demand such interpretations.

5. It can’t be found in Church History before the Reformation

If the so-called Universal Invisible Church is Biblical, then, why can’t it be found prior to the Reformation Period?????? Why is the very first recorded discussion on the nature of the church just a few hundred years after the Apostles completely silent about this doctrine? Nearly 900 preachers from all over the known world convened to discuss the true nature of the church and the idea of a

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universal invisible church never surfaced among them! It was the council of Nicaea in 425 A.D. consisting of over 400 Donatist Anabaptists and over 400 churches that ultimately became the Roman Catholic Church.

Augustine led the debate for the Catholic and tried to introduce a new concept called the Universal VISIBLE church while the Donatists rejected it and accused him of teaching two different kinds of churches, one that was local and visible and another that was universal and visible. In the Reformation the Anabaptist accused Luther of the very same thing when he introduced the “Universal INVISIBLE church” theory. If this theory is Biblical then why didn’t those closest to the time of the New Testament teach it? Why did the Donatists accuse Augustine of teaching TWO KINDS of churches if there were already two kinds of churches (one visible another invisible)????? Why? The answer is simple. It is because it is a false doctrine invented by the Reformers 1500 years after the writing of the New Testament.

6. It Perverts the Historical Biblical Context

It must be remembered that during the New Testament period, all churches were like faith and order with one another and jointly referred to as “*the churches of Christ.*” The contextual “*we*” found in New Testament epistles were united in the same faith and practice within the same kind of churches. Therefore, it is a perversion of the historical and Biblical context to define or interpret the contextual “*we*” in these epistles as Christians divided into contradicting denominations. This is especially true since the contextual “*we*” found in these epistles are explicitly commanded to avoid, have no fellowship with, but place under discipline such brethren who establish another kind of faith and order or conflicting and competing denominations (2 Thes. 3:6,14; I Cor. 5:6-13; Rom. 16:17).

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Therefore, in the context of the body of Christ and the churches of Christ, the contextual “we” at the very minimum refers to Christians who were like faith and order existing in the same kind of churches or what today we would call the same “denomination” of churches. Yet, the universal invisible church advocates rip the pronoun “we” out of its historical context and make it apply to a post-New Testament era of professed Christians existing within conflicting denominations as well as inclusive of those who have no kind of church affiliation whatsoever. The truth is that the contextual “we” refer to all Christians who are members of the same kind of church, holding the same faith and order. The so-called universal invisible church theory is simply Satan’s tool to justify those who have departed from the faith.

7. It robs the New Testament Churches of any abstract Instruction

It is common for a Pastor to make the statement, “This morning I will be preaching on the church and its ordinances.” He didn’t say what particular church or what particular ordinances but it is a common abstract statement that is commonly understood to mean the kind of church and ordinances practiced by that very Pastor and church. Most admit that the epistles written by the apostle Paul were circular letters intended to be passed from church to church (Col. 4:16) for common edification of all the churches since he was imprisoned and unable to return and build up each church. His letters are full of abstract language for teaching about “*the servant*” and “*the wife*” and “*the husband*” and “*the laborer*” and “*the old man*” and “*the new man*” and “*the body*” and “*the church*” and the list goes on. Such is common abstract language intended to instruct the particular person or church that reads it.

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Yet, every passage where this same abstract use of language occurs, it is robbed from New Testament churches and applied to something that cannot possibly make any kind of application of *practical* unity between its membership or *practical* assembling of its membership. Instead it justifies practical division and separation.

8. It promotes irresponsibility and disobedience to God's Word

The Great Commission is about making “disciples” and that very term necessarily includes discipline in New Testament faith and practice. The local visible church is placed in authority over its membership for instructive, corrective and if necessary purgative discipline (Mt. 18:15-18; I Cor. 5; 2 Thes. 3:6). However, the doctrine of the Universal Invisible Church completely invalidates any kind of church discipline whether it is instructive, corrective or purgative. The disciplined person simply tells the church, “*I belong to the TRUE church and I can worship God upon the hill or at my home or go to another church of “my” choice.*” Such a person will leave and will either join some church that promotes their sin or they will meet in their home and start a new denomination to promote their sins. Yet, they will leave and justify their departure on the boast they belong to the “TRUE” Church that requires no accountability to anyone and in reality promotes disobedience to Christ. This doctrine is the safe haven for all kinds of apostasy under the guise of the “true” church of Christ.

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The A,B,C Diagnostic Approach to the Universal Invisible Church Theory

*And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God **in Christ**, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.- Gal. 3:17 - “chosen **in him** before the foundation of the world” – Eph. 1:4*

In the following pages there are a series of questions and facts that are presented in a diagnostic format. The theory of the universal invisible church confuses basic essentials of salvation with the church. According to the universal invisible church theory the baptism in the Spirit occurs simultaneously with regeneration and is the means to place the believer into spiritual union with Christ or into the so-called mystical body of Christ. The advocates of this theory understand the prepositional phrase “in Christ” to refer to this spiritual union by the baptism in the Spirit.

We believe the Bible teaches no such thing. Indeed, we believe they confuse the baptism in the Spirit with the Biblical doctrine of regeneration and thereby confuse the church with salvation. There are many problems with this view of the baptism in the Spirit and spiritual union “in Christ.” These problems will be manifested in the following series of diagnostics questions and answers.

A. Salvation Questions:

1. Can Salvation be found OUTSIDE of Christ for anyone at any time? – Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12 – Answer – No!

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2. Can salvation be found OUTSIDE of Christ for Old Testament saints? – Eph. 1:4; 2 Thes. 2:13; Acts 10:43; Heb. 4:2 – No!
- 3.
4. Can Salvation be found in ANOTHER GOSPEL SALVATION other than that which was preached to Old Testament Saints? (Acts 10:43; 26:22-23; Heb. 4:2; I Cor. 15:4-5; Gal. 1-8-9) – No!

B. Salvation Facts:

1. All the elect were CHOSEN “*in Christ*” before the foundation of the world “*unto salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth*”. Were Old Testament saints chosen “*in Christ*” or are they **outside** of Christ and lost? **There is no third option.**
2. In regard to POSITION – all mankind are either “*in Adam*” or “*in Christ*” – Rom. 5:12-21. In which position are the Old Testament saints? **There is no third option**
3. In regard to REPRESENTATION – all mankind are either represented “*in Adam*” or “*in Christ*.” Which of the two represent the Old Testament saints? **There is no third option.**
4. In regard to JUSTICE – all mankind are either condemned “*in Adam*” or justified “*in Christ*.” Which characterizes the Old Testament saints (Abraham was “*in Christ*” – Gal. 3:17)? **There is no third option.**
5. In regard to the SPIRITUAL STATE – “*All in Adam die*” but “*all in Christ are made alive*.” In which condition are Old Testament saints? Spiritually dead or spiritually alive? **There is no third option.**

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6. In regard to REDEMPTION – all mankind are either unredeemed “*in Adam*” or redeemed “*in Christ*.” Are Old Testament saints redeemed or unredeemed? **There is no third option.**
7. In regard to SPIRITUAL UNION – all mankind are either in spiritual union with Satan (Eph. 2:2) or in Spiritual union with Christ. Who are Old Testament saints in spiritual union with? **There is no third option.**
8. In regard to FAMILY – all mankind are either in the family of Satan (Jn. 8:44) or in the family of God (Eph. 3:15). Which family are the Old Testament saints in? **There is no third option.**
9. In regard to BIRTH – all mankind are only natural born or spiritual born (Jn. 3:3-9; Gal. 4:28-29). Are Old Testament saints natural born or spiritual born? **There is no third option.**
10. In regard to SALVATION STATUS – all mankind are either lost or saved. Are Old Testament saints lost or saved. **There is no third option.**
11. In regard to HOLY SPIRIT INDWELLING – all mankind are either indwelt by an unholy spirit (Eph. 2:2) and “*in the flesh*” (Rom. 8:7-9a) or indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9) and “*in the Spirit*.” Who indwells Old Testament saints? Paul says all that are “*in the flesh*” are “*none of his*” (Rom. 8:8-9). **In Romans 8:7-9 Paul gives no third option for any man.**
12. In regard to JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH “*in Christ*”, why does Paul give as our example an Old Testament saint

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(Abraham) if he were not justified by faith “*in Christ*”? See Gal. 3:17 and Rom. 4. **No third option!**

The problem for big church advocates is how does one enter into the mystical universal invisible body of Christ? The baptism in the Spirit did not occur until Pentecost, and if the baptism in the Spirit is how one is brought into “spiritual union” with Christ, then Old Testament saints are not in “spiritual union” with Christ, and therefore lost, as there is no salvation **outside** of Christ.

C. Three basic Problems with the Universal Invisible Church Theory and their interpretation of Spirit baptism as being placed in the position of spiritual union with Christ.

1. The baptism in the Spirit is time fixed – Pentecost – Acts 1:5. Hence, no one previous to Pentecost could be baptized in the Spirit = thus no one could be put in spiritual union with Christ, if it were accomplished by the baptism in the Spirit. If that is true, then either the Old Testament Saints were saved **OUTSIDE** of Christ **OR** they are still “*in Adam*” both positionally and representatively, which means they are still in spiritual union with Satan, in the family of Satan, in the kingdom of Satan, spiritually dead, unjustified, condemned and lost. **There are no other options.**
2. The Foundation of the Church is constructed wholly out of New Testament materials – “*apostles and prophets*” (Eph. 2:20) and the apostles were first placed in the church (I Cor. 12:28). However, if spiritual union with Christ is placement into the church or body of Christ, then either Old Testament saints are saved **OUTSIDE** of Christ **OR** they are still “*in Adam*” both positionally and representatively,

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which means they are still in spiritual union with Satan, in the family of Satan, in the kingdom of Satan, spiritually dead, unjustified, condemned and lost. **There are no other options**

3. The gospel of salvation has always been the same (except for tense – forward looking to the cross in contrast to backward looking - Acts 10:43; 26:22-23; Heb. 4:2; Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12; etc.). However, since the baptism in the Spirit and the church never existed in the Old Testament, then it cannot possibly be part of gospel salvation UNLESS Old Testament saints were saved OUTSIDE of Christ by “*another gospel*” or they are still “*in Adam*” both positionally and representatively, which means they are still in spiritual union with Satan, in the family of Satan, in the kingdom of Satan, spiritually dead, unjustified, condemned and lost. **There are no other options.**

Spiritual Union “*in Christ*” is obtained exclusively by regeneration not Spirit baptism or membership into any kind of church. **Spiritual position** “*in Christ*” is obtained exclusively by justification by faith in the gospel not Spirit baptism or membership into any kind of church. The Universal Invisible Church/Body of Christ theory perverts the gospel and perverts salvation by confusing salvation “*in Christ*” with service “in Christ.” Salvation “*in Christ*” is by regeneration/conversion. Service “*in Christ*” is by water baptized into the membership of a local visible church body for service. The Baptism in the Spirit is an Institutional baptism that provided open confirmation of a new “*house of God.*”

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Conclusion

There can be no reconciliation between a universal invisible church that embraces all Christians, regardless of their practical relationship with Christ, and with New Testament congregations, which are charged to remove from their assemblies any “brother” who departs from the moral and doctrinal essentials of like faith and order. The very type of brethren the so-called universal invisible church theory must embrace are the very ones the New Testament congregations are commanded to withdraw from, and place under church discipline.

The universal invisible church theory cannot meet the essential criteria of the Great Commission essentials, nor can it meet the criteria for the church ordinances and qualifications for a properly ordained ministry (1 Tim. 3:1-13; Tit. 1:5-13).

The very nature of how the universal invisible church receives its members, repudiates the very essentials of salvation, as it requires the baptism in the Spirit, which is a time fixed event, be the instrumental means to place its members into spiritual union with Christ. However, that baptism had no existence prior to Pentecost, and thus, such a doctrine condemns all pre-Pentecost saints to a spiritual relationship outside of Christ during their whole life period.

The very nature of the universal invisible church promotes denominational confusion, and invalidates the Biblical doctrine of church discipline. If local congregations are simply the visible expressions of what the so-called “true” church is, then church

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discipline is impossible and churches should require no baptism for membership, nor should they adopt any confession of faith.

The real truth is that the so-called universal invisible church is merely the confusion of the Biblical doctrine of the church with the Biblical doctrines of the kingdom and family of God. The new birth is the only qualification to be part of the Kingdom and family of God, which are both universal and invisible, with regard to the hearts condition, and with regard to those already in heaven.

What needs to be recognized is that the church is not the kingdom or family of God, but is the institution God has designed within the kingdom and family of God to promote order, unity of doctrine, and practice among the children of God while on earth.

True New Testament congregations as churches of like faith and order as found in the pages of the New Testament. They originate with like faith and order, and they reproduce after their own kind according to the divine pattern set forth in the Great Commission (Mt. 28:19-10 and Acts 2:41-42).

Look for congregations that identify their origin and their faith and order in keeping with the principles, process and practice of the Great Commission. These alone are true New Testament congregations.