

What We believe about the Church

Thank you for inquiring about our belief concerning the New Testament Church. It is extremely important to be able to understand and identify what is and what is not a real Biblical true church of Christ.

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 essential basic 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. They are divided over Christ's identity. They are divided over whether the Bible is the completed Revelation of God or is even the inspired Word of God. They are divided over how people are saved and the list goes on and on.

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?

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 that harmonizes with the Word of God.

Third, would you agree, that just as, there are minimum essentials that distinguish a human being from an ape, or 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 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 (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 with each other or with the Scriptures that distinguish between true and false churches. The real question is does a particular church share the minimum essentials that Scriptures demand is necessary to be a true New Testament Church???? We believe the New Testament clearly and unmistakably identifies such minimal essentials of true churches. 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 the words “*teach*” (v. 19) and “*teaching*” (v. 20) are found in this commission. The first word “*teach*” found in verse 19 translates an Aorist tense imperative Greek verb that literally means “*make disciples.*” This is a comprehensive *command* to reproduce after their own kind. They are not to produce followers of a different doctrine and practice but followers of Christ’s doctrine and practice.

The second word “*teaching*” found in verse 20 translates a present tense Greek participle that literally means to “*instruct*” and it 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 baptized believers. Together, these terms demand that a specific type of disciple, one who is like faith and order with Christ, is to be produced.

C. The Great Commission Specifics

Therefore the Great Commission goal/focus of the commissioned is the same as the Genesis principle to reproduce "**after their own kind.**" In order that this might be accomplished there are five specifics/essentials given, three of which, define how this goal is reached but all five distinguish this kind of disciple from all other kinds.

Let us first begin with the three specifics that define how the commissioned are to reach their goal. There are three participles in this commission. They are translated (1) "*go*" (2) "*baptizing*" and (3) "*teaching.*" These three participles provide the basic fundamental rule of procedure or mode of operation in achieving the commissioned goal. The first participle "*go*" has for its object "*all nations*" and is accompanied with the preaching of the gospel (Mk. 16:15 – "go preach the gospel to all nations"). This is the first step in accomplishing the goal. The gospel must be preached to "*all nations.*" The remaining participles have to do with those from the nations who hear and respond to the gospel. Such are identified as "*them*" in the commission context ("*baptizing them*" and "*teaching them*") in distinction from the commissioned "*ye.*" Hence, there is an authorized administrator "*ye*" and those being disciplined "*them.*"

The second step in this process of disciple making is to baptize those who received the gospel followed by 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. These three participles ("*go,*" "*baptizing,*" and "*teaching*") provide the fundamental essential framework for reproducing after their own kind. 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 any gospel, not any baptism or any faith and practice but within the guidelines of "*whatsoever I have commanded you.*" The end result are "disciples" that are like faith and order within the boundaries of these three participles (same gospel, same baptism, same faith and order).

D. The Great Commission Essential specifics

Now we have come to where we specifically define the essentials that distinguish between true and false churches. As previously stated, true churches are composed of disciples that have been made by following the Great Commission specifics listed above:

1. The great Commission goal "make disciples" – reproducing LIKE FAITH AND ORDER

2. The Great Commission Order 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.
4. The Great Commission Administrator – An already existent Disciple plurality – “ye”

Christ never commissioned anyone to produce a **different kind** of disciple than His kind. Disciples who are replicated after another kind are not **His kind** of disciples. 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.

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). There is no such thing in the New Testament as a church 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.

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. Christ never authorized those identified as “*them*” in the Great Commission to administer any aspect of the Great Commission. What Christ instituted in the commission is like kind reproducing like kind. True New Testament Churches are originated/constituted by previous existing churches that are like faith and order. Churches do not evolve or self-produce themselves.

Conclusion

All true churches of Jesus Christ have at least these four 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 commissioned source “Ye” that are like faith and order. This is the disciple making framework commissioned by Christ until the end of the world (Mt. 28:20).