THE CHURCH IDENTIFIED

Intro: In John 17:20-21 “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; 21That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.” Jesus prayed for the unity of all believers. The Bible also teaches that division does not glorify God and is sin; 1 Cor. 1:10 “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” Rom. 16:17-18 “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. 18For 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.” Thus, the Scriptures teach there is but one church; Mat. 16:18 “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”, Eph. 4:4 “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;”, Eph. 1:18 “And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.” But, with over 1000 religious groups in the United States today, “which church is the Lord’s?”

I. CAN THE LORD’S CHURCH BE IDENTIFIED?
A. Old Testament example.
   1. Rom. 15:4 “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”
   2. The people abandoned the pattern of worship and service described in the Law of Moses.
   3. King Josiah and Ezra both brought about a restoration of the original through a study of God’s word.
      a. 2 Kings 22-23.
      b. Neh. 8-10.
B. The ability to identify the Lord’s church is based upon the ability to understand God’s word.
   1. We can understand the Bible; Eph. 5:17 “Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.”
   2. Thus, we are under obligation to understand it alike.
      a. 1 Cor. 1:10 “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” 1 Cor. 4:6 “And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another.”
      b. John 17:20-21 “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; 21That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.”
      c. Gal. 1:6-9 “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: 7Which is not another: but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. 8But 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. 9As 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."

3. If we could not understand the Bible alike then:
   a. Each would be permitted to “interpret” the Bible as he sees fit and thus, “join the church of his choice.”
   b. There would be no false doctrine.

II. HOW CAN THE CHURCH BE IDENTIFIED?

A. Example of meeting a person at an airport that you had never seen.
   1. Someone must tell you the characteristics of that person.
   2. Many characteristics would be common to others; but some would be peculiar to him.
   3. The sum total of those characteristics make him an individual distinct from all others.

B. The same procedure will identify the church.
   1. If a church possesses the characteristics, the sum total of which constitute the church of the New Testament, then that church is the church of the New Testament.
   2. While all these characteristics either exist or not, there are some which may exist in degrees of maturity. For example:
      a. A church is either organized according to the New Testament or not.
      b. Brotherly love may exist and yet need to be improved upon through greater maturity.

III. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH.

A. Time.
   1. During the days of the Roman Empire.
   2. Dan. 2:44 “And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.”

B. Place.
   1. Jerusalem
   2. Isa. 2:2-3 “And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.”

C. Name.
   1. No church can be the church described in the New Testament if it does not have a scriptural name.
   2. Any term which shows that the church belongs to Christ, or God is acceptable.
      a. Mat. 16:18 “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”
      b. Church of Christ; Rom. 16:16 “Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you.”
      c. Church of God; 1 Cor. 1:2 “Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:”, Acts 20:28 “Take heed therefore unto yourselves,
and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”

d. Church of the Firstborn; Heb. 12:23 “To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.”

e. The church and the kingdom are the same.

1. Kingdom of God; John 3:3, 5 “Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.... 5Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”

2. Kingdom of Christ; John 18:36 “Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.”, Col. 1:13 “Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:”

3. Kingdom of heaven; Mat. 16:19 “And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

f. Body of Christ; Eph. 4:12 “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:”; Eph. 1:22-23 “And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church,” 23Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.”

g. Bride of Christ; Eph. 5.

D. Only one head: Jesus Christ.

1. The scriptures make it clear that Christ is the only head of the church.

a. Eph. 1:22-23 “And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church,” 23Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.”

b. Col. 1:18 “And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.”

c. Col. 3:17 “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.”

2. A rejection of the headship (authority) of Christ is the main factor behind religious division.

3. Where is that authority today? In the Bible.

a. 2 Tim. 3:16-17 “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: 17That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.”

b. 1 Cor. 2:10-16 “But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. 11For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. 12Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. 13Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. 14But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. 15But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. 16For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.”

c. 1 Cor. 14:37 “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.”
4. Any religious group ruled by men’s creeds, synods, councils, presbyters, conferences, etc., has usurped the headship of Christ as revealed in the scriptures.

E. Organization.

1. The church is not just an organization but a living organism (Eph. 4:1-16) but within that organism there is organization.

2. Christ is the head.

3. Under Christ each congregation is autonomous, self-ruled.
   a. Under the direction of the scriptures.
   b. To carry on its work and mission.

4. Each congregation is to be self-governed by men who meet certain qualifications.
   a. Acts 14:23 “And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.”
   b. Tit. 1:5 “For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee:”
   c. The terms used are descriptive of their work.
      (1) Elders (presbyters) denotes their age and experience.
      (2) Overseers (bishops) denotes their work.
      (3) Pastors or shepherds denotes how they do their work.
      (4) Acts 20:17, 28 “And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church,... 28“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”
      (5) Tit. 1:5, 7 “For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee:... 7For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre;”
      (6) 1 Pet. 5:1-4 “The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: 2Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; 3Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. 4And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.”
      (7) Eph. 4:11 “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;”
   d. Their duty.
      (1) Acts 20:28 “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”
      (2) Tit. 1:9-11 “Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. 10For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: 11Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre’s sake.”
      (3) Heb. 13:7, 17 “Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. 17Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.”
(4) 1 Pet. 5:2-3 “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; 5Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.”

e. The men selected must meet the qualifications:

(1) 1 Tim. 3:1-7 “This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. 2A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; 3Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; 4One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; 5(For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) 6Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. 7Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.”

(2) Tit. 1:6-9 “If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. 7For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; 8But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; 9Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.”

5. Deacons are appointed as special servants to assist elders in carrying out their work. They must meet the qualifications in 1 Tim. 3:8-12 “Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubtleston, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; 9Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. 10And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. 11Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. 12Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.”

F. Worship.

1. God has not always been pleased with man’s worship.

a. Cain; Gen. 4
b. Nadab and Abihu; Lev. 10

2. God has given us directions for acceptable worship.

a. Singing

(1) 1 Cor. 14:15 “What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.”

(2) Eph. 5:19 “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;”

b. Prayer

(1) 1 Cor. 14:15 “What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.”

(2) 1 Thess. 5:17 “Pray without ceasing.”

c. Lord’s Supper each first day of the week (Sunday)

(1) Acts 2:42 “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”

(2) Acts 20:7 “And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.”

(3) 1 Cor. 11:20-34
d. Giving
   (1) 1 Cor. 16:1-2 “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.”
   (2) 2 Cor. 8-9

e. Bible Study or Preaching
   (1) Acts 2:42 “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”
   (2) Acts 20:7 “And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.”

G. Made up of those who have been born again.
   1. John 3:3, 5 “Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”
      a. Except carries the idea of, “if and only if.”
      b. The law of exclusion demands that only those born again will be saved.
   2. The difficulty lies in understanding “water and spirit.”
      a. Eph. 5:26 “That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,”
      b. Tit. 3:5 “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;”
   3. Baptism
      a. Mark 16:15-16 “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”
      b. Acts 2:38 “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”
      c. Acts 22:16 “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”
      d. Rom. 6:3-4 “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”
      e. 1 Cor. 12:13 “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.”
      f. Gal. 3:27 “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”
      g. 1 Pet. 3:21 “The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:”

H. Its work.
   1. The work of the church is spiritual and not physical or social.
      a. John 18:36 “Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.”
      b. Luke 19:10 “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.”
      c. The work of the church is that of salvation.
2. That salvation relates to three general areas of work.
   a. Preach to the lost.
      (1) Matt. 28:19-20 “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the
          Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20Teaching them to observe all things
          whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the
          world. Amen.”
      (2) Mark 16:15-16 “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel
          to every creature. 16He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not
          shall be damned.”
      (3) Luke 24:46-47 “And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to
          suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: 47And that repentance and remission of sins
          should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”
      (4) We see the early church demonstrating this; Acts 8:3-4 “As for Saul, he made
          havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed
          them to prison. 4Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.”
      (5) 1 Cor. 1:21 “For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it
          pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.”
   b. Edifying or building up the saved.
      (1) Eph. 4:11-16 “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists;
          and some, pastors and teachers; 12For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the
          ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: 13Till we all come in the unity of the faith,
          and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature
          of the fulness of Christ: 14That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and
          carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness,
          whereby they lie in wait to deceive; 15But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him
          in all things, which is the head, even Christ: 16From whom the whole body fitly joined
          together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual
          working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself
          in love.”
      (2) Acts 20:32 “And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace,
          which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are
          sanctified.”
      (3) 2 Pet. 3:18 “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
          To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.”
   c. Benevolence.
      (1) Gal. 6:9-10 “And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we
          faint not. 10As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto
          them who are of the household of faith.”
      (2) Eph. 4:28 “Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his
          hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.”
      (3) We see the church doing this:
         (a) Acts 2:44-45 “And all that believed were together, and had all things common;
             45And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had
             need.”
         (b) Acts 4:34-35 “Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were
             possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were
             sold, 45And laid them down at the apostles’ feet: and distribution was made unto every
             man according as he had need.”
(c) Acts 6:1-3 “And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.”

(d) Acts 11:27-30 “And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.”

(4) Acts 20:35 “I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

I. Other doctrinal matters must be recognized.
1. Recognition that babies are born innocent and not totally depraved.
2. Recognition that man has free moral agency and in not predestined as per Calvin.
3. Recognition that Christ died for all and not just for some.
4. Recognition of the possibility of apostasy.

J. It must have love.
1. Need for love.
   a. 1 Cor. 13:1-3 “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.”
   b. John 13:35 “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”
   c. Gal. 5:6 “For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.”
   d. Rev. 2:2-5 “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: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name’s sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.”
2. Our speech will be with love; Col. 4:6 “Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.”
3. They must love the lost.
   b. Matt. 9:35-38 “And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.”
4. We will love and contend for the truth.
   a. 2 Tim. 1:13 “Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.”
b. Jude 3 “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”

Conclusion: When a church stops doing those things that identify it as the Lord’s church it loses its identity. Let us do those things which would identify us as the Lord’s church.