

San Juan church of Christ

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What Does God's Word Say About... Christ's church and Its Pattern - Part 2

The Bible never envisioned a multiplicity of churches or denominations. Instead, the Bible speaks of "one body" (Eph. 4:4) with Jesus as its sole head (Eph. 1:22-23). When the apostle Peter became the first disciple to confess Jesus as the Christ, it was Jesus Himself who said He would build His church. This should tell us that the church is not a minor thing. Neither is the church a thing man can build on his own.

How did Jesus build the church? Look at the words of the apostle Paul when he met with the elders of the church in Ephesus. "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). Jesus built His church by dying on the cross for the sins of all mankind. That is why man cannot build a church without Christ, as no man can die for the sins of someone else, unless that man is sinless.

This should help us to see that the church is not a building or a location. The church is made up of people, those saved by the shed blood of Jesus and only the Lord can add us to the church when they have been obedient through baptism (Acts 2:38, 41, 47).

If there is a New Testament church there must be a pattern revealed in scripture by which that church can be identified and reproduced. Simply calling something a church does not mean Jesus would call it "His" church unless it were built according to the scriptural pattern in the Bible.

The church of Christ (Romans 16:16) has always been part of God's eternal purpose (Eph. 3:10-11, 21). The apostles' pattern indicates Jesus desire for all of His disciples to be united. Without a pattern of unity this would be impossible. Jesus prayed for unity in His body (John 17:20-21) and the apostle Paul wrote, "that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10). The apostle Paul also wrote, "Therefore I exhort you, to be imitators of me (1 Cor. 4:16). In 1 Corinthians 4:17, Paul teaches "my ways" equals Paul's apostolic ways, which he "teaches everywhere in every church."

If there was no pattern to follow then the following commands would make no sense from Paul. "Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting" (Romans 16:17-18). Paul told Timothy to "instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines" and to "Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me" (1 Tim. 1:3; 2 Tim. 1:13). This is Paul's instruction for preachers to stay doctrinally sound in their teaching.

The New Testament doctrine is considered as "the faith." This faith is presented as both "singular" and "distinctive." It can be preached, heard, with certainty (Acts 6:7; Gal. 1:23). We must "contend earnestly" for it (Jude 3) and must "strive together for the faith of the gospel" (Phil. 1:27). The New Testament affirms that there is only "one faith" (Eph. 4:5). If there was not one unchanging system of spiritual truth we would never be told to "continue in the faith" (Acts 14:22). Therefore, the singularity and distinctiveness of New Testament Christianity stands in sharp contrast to the religious division which is seen today in the many denominations which originate from men.

The "seed principle" indicates that seeds produce after their own kind (Gen. 1:11-12). Jesus talks about "a spiritual seed" (Luke 8:4-15). This seed will only produce what God desires, i.e., Christians. It is only through our obedience to this seed [the word of God] that we can be saved (1 Peter 1:22-25).

Please send any comments, questions, or requests for a Bible study to: info@sanjuanchurchofchrist.org