



BEACON

Vol. LV / No. 35

August 31, 2026

A Publication of Bellview Church of Christ

4850 Saufley Field Road; Pensacola, FL 32526
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The Identity of the Church

Foy E. Wallace, Jr.

Upon this rock will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Mat. 16:18).

The world hears so much of the denominational in religion, both in pulpit and press, such as Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical, etc., that it must be wondering if Christ Himself ever had a church, and if He has one today, where is it? How could one find it? Out of the many churches that are in the world today, which church is right—which church did Jesus build?

There is no arbitrary manner or method of settling such questions. It is a matter of identity and can be determined only by marks, or **characteristics**. If an automobile is lost, it can be identified by make, model, and number. If the church is lost, it may be found only by identification based on New Testament descriptions. The church is a New Testament institution, and hence, a perfect description of it is therein set forth.

Being a question of identity, similarity will not do. A thing may be similar, yet not identical. To establish identity with the New Testament church, the church today must be Scriptural in every essential feature.

1. It must be Scriptural in origin. Everything began by a miracle but continues through law. First, creation then procreation. God created the first man and woman and then placed within them the potentiality of procreation. Likewise,

God created the church (Eph. 2:14-16) and then provided for its perpetuity through the potentiality of the seed of the kingdom which “is the word of God” (Luke 8:11). So long as the seed exists, the power of reproduction is present. Therefore, an unbroken line of church succession is unnecessary to be argued. The church today is produced by the Word of God and exists wherever men and women have obeyed it.

2. It must be Scriptural in doctrine. The Great Commission represents the constitution of the church. The law of pardon, or terms of admission into it, are clearly and unmistakably set forth. Matthew says, “teach and baptize”—not baptize and teach. Mark says, “preach, believe, baptized, saved”—not believed, saved, and baptized. Luke says, “repentance and remission of sins.” The order of these items, both Scripturally and psychologically, then, is preaching faith, repentance, baptism, and salvation. On Pentecost, Peter first executed this commission. He preached. The hearers believed, repented, and were baptized “for the remission of sins.” The Lord added them to the church. There is no other way to get into it. The same thing it took to make Christians then, it takes to make Christians now. All who teach or practice to the contrary are unscriptural in doctrine, and that destroys identity.

3. It must be Scriptural in worship. Paul reminds us to keep the ordinances as he delivered them unto us and warns against “will worship,” or

self-devised worship, “after the commandments and doctrines of men” (Col. 2:22-23). Scriptural doctrine is no more important than Scriptural worship. A rigid adherence to correct doctrine and an *expediency* policy in worship is inconsistent. A “Thus saith the Lord” is no more imperative in one than in the other, and the New Testament requires it in both. Therefore, in the worship, the teaching of the apostles and the practice of the New Testament church must be our teaching and practice. The limit of their teaching must be the limit of our practice. To introduce innovations, such as instrumental music, “which the Catholics foolishly borrowed from the Jews,” is but to destroy identity in worship with the New Testament church. That the Jews used it is a fact, but that Christian Jews did not use it is another fact, and why they ceased to use it, as they did other Jewish observances, has a significant bearing on the issue, and is reason enough for its non-use by Christians today. As well add to the doctrine of the New Testament as to its worship, and as well affiliate with those who do one as with those who do the other.

4. It must be Scriptural in work. Christians are commanded to “work out their own salvation.” For this purpose, we have set forth in the New Testament a divine arrangement, the local church. Its organization is simple, not complex. As a perfectly framed, living, working organism, with elders, deacons, and members, it provides all the organization required to do the work that God has commanded the church to do. “Unto him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages” (Eph. 3:21).

5. It must be Scriptural in name. The church of Christ is not a name—it is a thing; and since that is what it is, why call it something else? We are willing to call the church by any Scriptural name or title, but by no name or title not found in the Bible. The Bible is latitude and longitude enough on both names and things in religion—Bible things by Bible names.

Reverting to the question of identity, when you find a body of people today who are Scriptural in origin, doctrine, worship, organization, work, and name you have by identification found the Bible church.

Deceased

A Beautiful Place Called Heaven

T. Pierce Brown

There is a beautiful place called Heaven. It is hidden above the bright blue!

No Bible teacher would make the statement that Heaven is hidden “out yonder somewhere beyond the stars.” Is the thing described in Revelation 21 a place? Do not misunderstand me. I cannot conceive of Heaven not existing somewhere. Neither can I conceive of the church not existing somewhere. But an adequate description of the church is not a description of the place in which it meets.

One may say, “The church is the place where all the saved are,” but that does not mean that the church is a geographical location. It is a spiritual relationship. Revelation 21 and 22 describe “the

holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband” (21:2). Verses 8 and 10 say that John is about to see a vision of the “bride, the wife of the Lamb....the holy city Jerusalem.”

Is the “bride” a place? Or is it a people in a place? Of all the opinions about so many other things in the book, surely there is no disagreement about that. The church, the bride of Christ, refers to people. The bride is the church of Christ. The church is spoken of as a city. A city is a place. But when we look at the whole picture, it should not be hard to see that, when we speak of the church as a building, with us as “living stones” in it, we still do not think of it as a place (1 Pet. 2:5).

The holy city is the people of God—not a place. You may ask, “So what?” The answer is: We should be more concerned with the quality of the people who are thinking of “going to Heaven” than we are with the quality of the place to which they think they are going. For the same reason, we should be more concerned with the quality of the people who are “going to church” than with the quality of the building or place where they meet.

Many put more emphasis on building a beautiful church building than on building a beautiful church (the members). My judgment is that if we preach about the *description* of Heaven in Revelation more in terms of a representation of the people rather than as a description of a place, we would not only be giving a better exegesis of the passage, but we will also help people be elevated from material to spiritual things.

Are you a jewel among God’s people? Are you a lively stone in the spiritual house (2 Pet. 2:5) or a stumbling stone? Some are gold, silver, and pre-

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cious stones (1 Cor. 3:12). The wood, hay, and stubble did not make it.

Howbeit the firm foundation of God standeth, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his: and, Let every one that nameth the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness. Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some unto honor, and some unto dishonor. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, meet for the master’s use, prepared unto every good work (2 Tim. 2:19-21).

Deceased

We have Found the Messiah

Rich Miescke

Growing up, you and I may wonder why there are so many different religions in the world. I grew up in a community that was one-third Catholic, one-fourth Missouri Synod Lutheran, one-fourth Evangelical Lutheran, along with several others. There appeared to be barriers as I was in one group, and others were in other groups. As the eventual apostle Andrew told his brother Simon (later called Peter), “We have found the Messiah” (John 1:41), we discover that the result of Jesus’ life was to end the enmity between the previously chosen (Jews) and the Gentiles who had no hope and were without God (Eph. 2:12). His purpose was to provide salvation and hope for everyone on the earth (Gal. 3:28).

However, by following the Book of books (the Bible), with instructions to **not** add or subtract from it (Rev. 22:18-19; Deu. 4:2; Pro. 30:5-6), Paul the apostle reminds us not to identify ourselves with

certain men or groups in the religious world. For example, as some early Christians were saying, “there are contentions among you. Now this I mean, that each one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided?” (1 Cor. 1:11-13). We all know what the answer should be—**No!** I believe this same thing could be said of men today—“I am of John the Baptist, I am of Martin Luther, I am of John Calvin, I am of Catholicism, etc.”

As the Messiah came to break down the barrier of a dividing wall between Jew and Gentile some 2000 years ago, we also should remove the barriers of the religious world that have been erected to divide us. Jesus came to earth to bring a message of unity, not division, but it can only be done by following The Book!

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How long, O Jehovah? wilt thou forget me for ever? How long wilt thou hide thy face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, Having sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall mine enemy be exalted over me? Consider *and* answer me, O Jehovah my God: Lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the *sleep of death*; Lest mine enemy say, I have prevailed against him; *Lest* mine adversaries rejoice when I am moved. But I have trusted in thy lovingkindness; My heart shall rejoice in thy salvation. I will sing unto Jehovah, Because he hath dealt bountifully with me. (Psa. 13)

Sick

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Defender and Beacon

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Bible Classes for all ages — 9:00 a.m.

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