

# Finding the Right Church / Identifying Marks of the First Century Church

Based on "In the Same Hour of the Night", by Charles Goodall

Preached 9/2011 at Blue Ridge Church of Christ, Roanoke, VA & at Hillcrest church of Christ, OH

- I. Introduction
  - a. There are over 13,000 denominations in America today. That being the case, how do we find the right church in today's society? Some would say it is unnecessary, that we should simply worship at the church of our choice, and find any group that suits our personal needs and desires. If we are convinced that Jesus built one church, however, as He said He did, and if we desire to be his disciples or followers, we will want to worship at, and be members of, the church that Jesus Christ purchased with His own blood, and no other.
  - b. The Seed Principle**
    - i. In our efforts to find the right church, one principle that will help us is the principle that seed produces after its kind. Turnip seed -> turnip; Pumpkin seed -> pumpkin etc
    - ii. Luke 8:11 – The seed is the word of God
    - iii. Paul taught the word of God and it produced a Christian. Peter did the same. The word of God produces Christians
    - iv. We may not agree on what the Word of God says to make a Christian, but there is no doubt that if we could find out what Peter and Paul taught and teach that, the result would be a Christian.
    - v.
- II. Hyphenated Christians
  - a. Conversation: "What are you religiously?" "Catholic" "I was looking for a Christian" "I am a Christian." "I thought you said you were a Catholic" "I am a Catholic Christian"
  - b. The word of God makes a Christian. If a person is a Catholic Christian, something in addition to the word of God made him that. That something is the Catholic Catechism (show it)
    - i. In the same way, the word of God PLUS the Book of Common Prayer makes an Episcopalian Christian. It is the same for every denomination and its creed book.**
    - ii. The word of God PLUS the creed book of the particular church makes that kind of Christian.
      - 1. Mormons: Book of Mormon
      - 2. Methodists: Methodist Discipline
      - 3. Presbyterians: Confession of Faith
      - 4. Lutherans: Luther's Catechism
  - c. Why a Creed Book?
    - i.** Many individuals who may be of a particular denomination may never have seen the creed book of their church. The preacher

typically does not stand up in the pulpit and say, “Today I am going to read you from our creed book.” But the creed book serves a very important purpose for each different church. It crystallizes and homogenizes the beliefs of that church

**ii. Mountain illustration –**

1. You could go up on a mountain with just the word of God and come down a Christian. You couldn't come down a Catholic, because Catholic doctrine is not in the Bible. If you went up on the mountain with the Bible and the book of Mormon you could not come down a Catholic because Catholic doctrine is neither in the Bible nor the Book of Mormon. If you went up the mountain with the Baptist Manual, you couldn't come down a Methodist, because Methodist doctrine is not in the Bible nor in the Baptist manual.

**iii. The Irrelevance of Creed Books**

1. If the creed book has more than the Bible it is too much.
2. If it has less than the Bible, it is too little.
3. If it is the same as the Bible, why do you need it?
- 4. We need to discard the creed books and simply rely on the word of God for our faith and practice.**

**III. Identifying Mark #1 - Conversion**

- a. We will look in the book of Acts and examine every instance in which details were given about conversion. In a “bookkeeping” fashion, we will record what each person was told to do. Then we will see if there is a pattern.
- b. Cases of Conversion
  - i. Acts 2:38 – Jews at Pentecost
    1. Repent
    2. Be Baptized
  - ii. Acts 8:12 - Samaritans
    1. Belief
    2. Baptism
  - iii. Acts 8:35-39 - Simon
    1. Confession
    2. Baptized
  - iv. Acts 9:4-6; Acts 22:16 – Saul of Tarsus
    1. Baptism
  - v. Acts 10:43, 47-48 - Cornelius
    1. Cornelius had been told to get Peter who would tell him “words by which he would be saved.” When Peter arrived, Cornelius asked him to tell him “all things commanded by God.” What were the things Peter commanded Cornelius to do?
      2. Believe
      3. Be baptized

- vi. Acts 16:14-15 - Lydia
  - 1. Heard/belief
  - 2. Baptized
- vii. Acts 16:28-31 – Phillipian Jailer
  - 1. Believe
  - 2. Be Baptized
- c. Observations
  - i. **Many blanks**
    - 1. **Bible teachings are not given in complete sermons**
      - a. To know what the truth is on a Bible subject, you need to read everything the Bible says about it. For example, the Lord’s Supper
    - 2. **Many converts were at different stages when they heard**
      - a. Phillipian Jailer had never heard of Jesus, he was told to believe – Car trip illustration – Pentecost needed to repent and be baptized – Saul just needed to be baptized
    - 3. **Blanks filled in by Scriptural requirements**
      - a. All must believe – John 8:24; Heb. 11:6
      - b. All must repent – Luke 13:5; Acts 17:30
      - c. All must confess – Rom. 10:8-10
      - d. All must be baptized – Mark 16:16; Gal. 3:27
  - ii. Baptism
    - 1. **All recorded, sense of urgency**
    - 2. Ethiopian eunuch not told to wait until his journey was over. He was baptized immediately. Saul was told, “Why are you waiting?” Phillipian jailer was baptized the same hour of the night.
- d. Why Baptism
  - i. No salvation without the blood of Jesus
    - 1. **Eph 1:7 – blood redeems**
    - 2. **Col 1:14 – blood forgives**
    - 3. **Rev. 7:14 – blood washes**
  - ii. But other passages say that baptism does the same thing!
    - 1. **Acts 2:38 – baptism remits sin**
    - 2. **Acts 22:16 – baptism washes away sin**
    - 3. **1 Pet 3:21 – baptism cleanses the conscience**
  - iii. Connection or Contradiction?
    - 1. **How could two different things both remove sin? Either there is a contradiction, or the two things are related. They are.**
    - 2. **Remember, Jesus shed his blood in His death (John 19:34)**
  - iv. There is a pattern or form of doctrine that one follows when they are converted – Rom. 6:17
  - v. **Rom. 6:3-5**

1. **Baptism is an enactment of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. The act of baptism portrays those momentous events surrounding the cross of Jesus Christ:**
    - a. We are dead in sin,
    - b. buried in baptism,
    - c. then rise saved (alive) from the watery grave.
  2. **“Baptized into his death” – that’s where His blood was shed**
  3. **“If you have been buried in the likeness...” - A person can determine if he/she was baptized scripturally, by comparing his/her baptism with the Bible pattern**
- vi. Col. 2:11-13
1. The same form is mentioned “buried with Him in baptism”, the same connection is made between baptism and the death of Jesus Christ, where his blood was shed
- vii. This is the form that Paul was discussing in Romans, and this is the connection between baptism and the blood that Jesus shed in His death
- e. A Counter-Example
- i. Baptist Doctrine in One Year - “There are two ways of receiving members into a church. 1) By experience and baptism  
2) By letters of dismission from sister churches.
  - ii. In accordance with the first way, persons wishing to unite with a church give an account of the dealings of God with their souls, and state the “reason for the hope that is in them” whereupon, if, in the judgment of the church they “have passed from death into life” they are by vote of the church recognized as candidates for baptism, with the understanding that when baptized they will be entitled to all the rights and privileges of membership.” – pg. 24
  - iii. **This statement is from a human creed book and gives a procedure found nowhere in the word of God.**
  - iv. **This procedure requires a person to pass from death to life BEFORE burial in baptism – You don’t bury people when they are alive!**
  - v. **If this were the likeness of Jesus death, burial and resurrection, then Jesus would have died on the cross, rose again, and then been buried in the tomb. This process of denominational baptism violates the “form” given in Romans 6 – If a person has not obeyed this form of doctrine, then he has not contacted the blood of Christ, is not saved and cannot enjoy what has been promised to those who come forth from the water grave “in the likeness of His resurrection”**
  - vi. **Following a human procedure for conversion may be sufficient for gaining entrance to a church created by man, but Jesus gave the pattern for entry into His church, and that is what we**

**must follow if we want to find ourselves in the Church that  
Jesus Christ purchased with His own blood**

- IV. Other Identifying Marks of the Church
  - a. Identifying Mark #2 – Organization
    - i. Elders and Deacons – Acts 14:23; Acts 20:28
  - b. Identifying Mark #3 – Lord’s Supper each Sunday
    - i. Acts 20:7
  - c. Identifying Mark #4 – Free-will offering each Sunday
    - i. 1 Cor. 16:1-2
  - d. Called Simply Christians – Acts 11:26
  - e. *Christ’s church can be found today by looking for a church with these characteristics*
- V. Conclusion
  - a. Car Illustration
    - i. My Car
      - 1. 1995
      - 2. Toyota
      - 3. Corolla
      - 4. Blue exterior
      - 5. Gray interior
      - 6. KLR 1509, Virginia
    - ii. I see Another Car
      - 1. New
      - 2. Mercedes
      - 3. Convertible
      - 4. Red Exterior
      - 5. White Interior
      - 6. CHERI-G, New York
      - 7. I know, that’s not my car! Christ church can be identified just as easily and with that much assurance
  - b. One Church
    - i. Church of Christ - Christians
    - ii. Belief, Repentance, Confession, Baptism
    - iii. Elders & Deacons
    - iv. Lord’s Supper  
each Sunday
    - v. Free Will Offering  
each Sunday
    - vi. That must be a church of Christ, it has the identifying marks of the church that existed in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century which I can read about in the New Testament
  - c. **Another Church**
    - i. Baptist Church -  
Baptists
    - ii. Voted on,  
“Buried Alive”

- iii. No Elders, only Deacons
  - iv. Communion  
once a month
  - v. “Tithe”,  
rummage sale, etc
  - vi. **“This is not Christ’s church!”**
  - vii. If you can’t make that comparison, you would probably get into the wrong car. God’s people are found in most communities by this means. If none is there, conscientious people refuse to be associated with organized religions created by human beings, but begin to meet together and thus establish Christ’s church in that community.
- d. Invitation – Where are You?
- i. Convicting – Belief – John 8:24
  - ii. Turning – Repent – Luke 13:5
  - iii. Telling – Confession – Rom. 10:9-10
  - iv. Cleansing – Baptism – Mark 16:16
  - v. Saved – Walk faithfully to make it home
  - vi. No stage is more important than another, each is essential. A person cannot be baptized until the earlier stages are completed. As one is baptized into Christ, he contacts the blood of Christ and has his sins washed away, arriving at the saved status.
  - vii. Everyone in the world can be seen as being in one of these stages. Where are you?