

How to Identify the Body of Christ Today

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There are many sincere people who associate with various religious organizations around the world, and very few would claim to be members of these fellowships if they believed their particular group held theological errors. As scripture states that mankind is to “prove all things,” when it comes to correctly worshipping Almighty God, it is very important that every member of a Christian organization examine whether or not the beliefs, teachings, and doctrines of their fellowship are in accordance with scripture,

Prove all things, hold fast that which is good (1Thes. 5:21; KJV).

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world (1Jn. 4:1; NKJV used throughout unless otherwise noted).

Just because a Christian organization may understand certain scriptures correctly, it is no guarantee that Almighty God is working through that structure. In fact, it is often those organizations claiming emphatically that they represent God accurately that are the most deceived,

Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall (1Cor. 10:12).

Those who believe they are not deceived are usually the ones who accuse other religious groups of teaching errors. In reality, the majority of this world’s religions “miss the mark” when it comes to accurately explaining God’s truth, according to scripture (Mt. 24:14; 28:19-20). As a result, most of these organizations unwittingly mislead their members, which explains why they are described as blind leaders,

Woe to you **blind leaders** of the way, who say, ‘Whoever makes an oath on the naos (inner sanctuary), it is nothing; but whoever makes an oath on the gold of the naos (inner sanctuary), he owes.’¹⁷ **Fools and blind**, for what is greater, the gold, or the naos (inner sanctuary) which makes the gold holy? (Mt. 23:16-17; RNT; cf. 23:18-19, 24, 26; emphasis added; Ed. notes in parentheses).

Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you go about the sea and the dried out *places* to make one proselyte, and when it happens, you make him a son of Gehenna (A rubbish pit where trash, dead animals and dead criminals were cast out from the city and burned) **twofold more than you** (Mt. 23:15; RNT; Ed. note in parenthesis).

Logically, if God’s truth was taught and understood correctly among all religious organizations, they would all be in agreement and would cooperate with each other, but this has not been the case in man’s history. Instead, there has been nothing but competition and conflict between the various religions. In fact, many wars have been waged between different religious groups with each side expecting God to grant them victory (Ac. 10:34),

Where do wars (battles) and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? (Jas. 4:1).

Once any religious structure believes and teaches that it, and it alone, has all the answers when it comes to correctly explaining God's plan of salvation for mankind, there is no room for its membership to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ (2Pet. 3:18). Instead it will stagnate, spiritually speaking, unless it repents and exercises the humility necessary to admit and accept the possibility of error in order to continue growing. If it refuses to humble itself, only those members who do accept this possibility, and depart from that structure, will be able to continue growing in their relationship with God (Rev. 3:20). These same self-righteous religious organizations often imply, or state emphatically, that if their members depart from their fellowship they will be in serious danger of losing their opportunity to inherit everlasting life. This is a lie and those who teach this falsehood will be held accountable,

And whoever might cause to stumble, one of these little ones who trust in me, it is better if the millstone of a donkey is laid around his neck and he is cast into the sea (Mk. 9:42; RNT).

And I (Christ) say to you, every careless word which men shall speak, they will give account for it in the day of judgment (Mt. 12:36; RNT; cf. Rom. 14:12; Ed. note in parenthesis).

Because of their position within a religious organization, leaders can convince their members that they alone are given special knowledge from God, or that they are better qualified to understand and interpret the Bible than the rest of the brethren. As a result, the members of these organizations will often look to these leaders as the source of truth rather than the head of God's true church, Jesus Christ. When this occurs, the congregation is unwittingly following/worshipping a human leader, and is guilty of idolatry as well as breaking the spiritual intent of the first two commandments (Ex. 20:1-5).

Also, if individuals in these religious structures discover a particular truth in scripture that conflicts with the current doctrines of the organization, they are usually told by the leadership that their interpretation is not accurate. If they share their new idea with others in the fellowship, they could be accused of causing division. Should they persist in this conduct, the result would likely be their removal from that particular church. Consequently, far too many members in these structures blindly follow the church leadership out of fear, and do whatever they are told. When one of these highly regarded church leaders dies, there is a strong tendency to carry on teaching the same doctrines introduced by that administration without closer examination or question. This means that the human leader's teachings cannot be challenged, or changed, even if Biblical evidence is produced after their death indicating they were wrong. As a result, many people continue living in error and this usually includes transgressing God's commands.

In Jewish religious communities, the oral traditions of previous generations are often held as having greater authority than the Hebrew Scriptures. Because of this, some Biblical laws are ignored and manmade traditions are considered more important than scripture itself (Mt. 15:3, 6; Mk. 7:8-9; Gal. 1:14). One example of this goes back to 320-

385 CE when Rabbi Hillel II introduced postponements to God's calendar. As a result of these changes Jews, who believe they are obeying God, are in fact observing God's appointed festivals on the wrong days (Lev. 23:2, 4, 37, 44). Therefore, they are sinning against God (1Jn. 3:4). This form of sin is not limited to the Jewish community because some Christian groups firmly believe that the Jews keep God's calendar and Holy Days correctly, and then blindly follow their example without closer examination,

Then the disciples drew near to say to him, 'Do you know that the Pharisees having heard this word, were caused to stumble?' ¹³ And he answered and said, '**Every plant that was not planted by my heavenly Father will be pulled up by the roots.**' ¹⁴ **Depart from them; they are blind leaders of the blind, and if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into the pit'** (Mt. 15:12-14; RNT; emphasis added).

Because the Jewish religious leadership is spiritually blind to the truth regarding God's calendar, they mislead others who blindly follow their example. Consequently, many people are now in a spiritual ditch (sin) even though they believe they are obeying God correctly. One modern example of this process involves a Christian organization that was formed by a leader called Herbert Armstrong. He understood that the law and commandments of Almighty God were still in effect and were to be obeyed by Christians. Unfortunately, he adopted the Jewish calendar which meant that he and all his followers observed some of God's Holy Days at the wrong time, while completely ignoring other Holy Days that should be kept, such as the New Moons (see study: The New Moon). Also, Mr. Armstrong adopted the Jewish tradition of observing the beginning and end of the day at sunset, which is contrary to scripture (see study: How to Determine the Beginning and End of the Day). Following Mr. Armstrong's death on January 16, 1986, his church broke into numerous splinter groups that continued to preserve his teachings which contain many errors. Therefore, all these offshoots unwittingly transgress God's law even though they claim to be fulfilling the end-time commission of Elijah that Mr. Armstrong taught about. This commission is to restore the law and commandments of God prior to Christ's return (Mk. 9:12). When confronted with these errors, the leaders of these various offshoots have forgotten the example of the Bereans who listened to the apostle Paul as he explained some of God's truth, and then examined the scriptures to confirm whether Paul taught the truth correctly. Instead of doing this, the leaders of these offshoots plug their ears and cover their eyes because they hold the teachings of a man as being more important, or reliable, than God's word (Mt. 13:14-15),

Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. ¹¹These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so (Ac. 17:10-11).

Another large portion of Christianity holds the error of the trinity or a modification of the trinity doctrine (binitarianism/ditheism) that describes Almighty God and Jesus Christ as co-equal spirit-beings. Until these beliefs are rejected, those who adhere to them cannot inherit everlasting life and any religious organization that teaches these falsehoods cannot be part of the true body of Christ,

But this is age-abiding life, that they might know You, the only true God (The Almighty), and whom You sent, Jesus Christ (Jn. 17:3; RNT; cf. 1Jn. 5:5; Ed. note in parenthesis; see study, The Trinity).

You believe that there is one God (Almighty). You do well. Even the demons believe (unlike much of Christianity!) – and tremble (Jas. 2:19; Ed. notes in parentheses).

But the hour comes and now it is, when genuine kneelers will kneel before the Father in spirit and truth; for such the Father seeks – those kneeling before Him (Jn. 4:23; RNT; emphasis added).

Any Christian organization that has substituted God's Holy Days for pagan holidays like Sunday, Halloween, Christmas and Easter (see study: Why Christians Should Keep Passover Instead of Easter), cannot be part of the body of Christ,

Thus says the Lord: 'Do not learn the way of the Gentiles; do not be dismayed at the signs of heaven, for the Gentiles are dismayed at them. For the customs of the peoples are futile; for **one cuts a tree from the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the ax. They decorate it with silver and gold; they fasten it with nails and hammers so that it will not topple.** They are upright, like a palm tree, and they cannot speak; they must be carried, because they cannot go by themselves. Do not be afraid of them, for they cannot do evil, nor can they do any good (Jer. 10:2-5; emphasis added).

And he (Christ) said to them, "**The Sabbath came into existence on account of man** (not just the Jews, cf. Gen. 2:2-3), **not man on account of the Sabbath** (Mk. 2:27; RNT; Ed. notes in parentheses).

Any religious organization that is incorporated under the laws of the state in which they are registered cannot ultimately be part of the true body of Christ. Incorporation places the mandate of a spiritual body, to operate as the body of Christ, under state authority and makes it subject to the laws of a worldly government (Jn. 15:19; 17:14, 16),

Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said: 'We ought to obey God rather than men' (Ac. 5:29).

They (Christ's followers) **are not of the world, just as I** (Christ) **am not of the world** (Jn. 17:16; cf. Jn. 15:19; 17:14; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

There are many human reasons for leaders to incorporate a religious structure, and when examined closely they are all contrary to the spiritual intent of God's law.

Any group of people who believe that Christ is the head of his spiritual body would not attempt to make that same "head," Jesus Christ, subject to the state in any way, shape, or form. Instead, they would trust that the head of the spiritual body is more than capable of protecting it from any attacks. However, this truth depends on its members trusting, or having faith, that Christ will honor his word in this regard,

And I (Christ) **also say to you that you are Petros** (Peter, a small stone or rock), **but on this Petra** (Almighty God, a massive Rock; cf. Mt. 16:17b) **I will build my assembly, and the gates of hades** (death/the grave) **will not prevail** (be victorious) **against it** (Mt. 16:18; RNT; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

Incorporating a religious group as a registered state-sanctioned business, just like highly successful and recognizable companies are, adds a sense of identity and credibility in the eyes of its members and even those who are not. Christ spoke about this human proclivity that seeks to be recognized by others even at the expense of disobeying the spiritual intent of God's law,

Likewise, indeed, also among the rulers many believed in him (Christ), but because of the Pharisees (religious leaders in the community) they were not confessing *him*, so that they might not become unsynagogued (put out or disfellowshipped from the synagogue); ⁴³**for they loved the glory of men more than the glory of God** (Jn. 12:42-43; RNT; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

Another important aspect of seeking worldly credibility is that it justifies the leaders collecting the tithes/offerings of its followers (see study: The Tithing Law). After all, they have created a centralized governing authority that can determine how this manmade structure should operate and how funds are spent, including the salaries, business expenses, and other perks associated with any corporation. In the end, there is precious little difference between the way an incorporated company functions and an incorporated church. Both structures will do whatever they have to in order to preserve themselves and protect their self-interests. This should help explain why religious leaders will abuse their members when they deem it essential to preserving their incorporated church. The end justifies the means. The Roman Catholic system is an example of this, but far from the only one, and yet the lessons of abuse have been lost because these manmade structures, masquerading as bastions of piety, continue to harm many people both physically, emotionally, and spiritually. It is doubly difficult when a religious corporation becomes wealthy. In cases like this, there are enough funds to prevent true justice from taking place in lawsuits against the church, allowing it to continue its sinful behavior with impunity (Eze. 34:1-22; Jer. 23:1-6). As the saying goes, "power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

In contrast, Christ's example is one in which his followers trusted completely in his leadership, and there were limited funds to carry out the work. Also, he taught his disciples to make sure they never became abusive toward those they were to instruct. Therefore, they would not incorporate under the laws of the Roman government of the time, even if they could,

But Jesus having called them (his disciples) toward *himself*, said, '**You know that the rulers of the nations (Gentiles) Lord over them and the great men exercise authority over them.** ²⁶**It shall not be this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant;** ²⁷**and whoever among you wishes to be first shall be your bondservant** (Mt. 20:25-27; RNT; Ed. notes in parentheses).

So Christ practiced what he preached and did not take a group of followers, create a church name, and then incorporate it under the laws of the Roman state. In fact, his church did not even have a name to register, and yet today if a religious group does not have a name they are viewed as having no real credibility. It is incredulous how far removed ecclesiastic organizations have come from the time of Christ's ministry. It is also assumed by many people that the body of Christ must have buildings to meet in,

otherwise it is not legitimate. This would be a strange argument during the time of the apostles because they often met in people's houses, even on Holy Days,

And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind and **it filled the whole house where they were sitting** (on the day of Pentecost) (Ac. 2:2; cf. 20:20; 28:30; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

Likewise greet **the church that is in their house** (Priscilla and Aquila's) (Rom. 16:5; cf. 1Cor. 16:19; emphasis added).

Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and Nymphas (Nympha) and **the church that is in his (her) house** (Col. 4:15; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

To the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and **to the church in your house** (Phm. 1:2; emphasis added).

It has been assumed by many religious people that the true body of Christ must be large in number, but according to scripture it is usually small, scattered, and in various stages of persecution, depending on conditions in society at the time,

Do not fear **little flock**, for your Father has thought well of you to give you the kingdom (Lk. 12:32; RNT; emphasis added).

For many are called, but **few are chosen** (Mt. 22:14; RNT; emphasis added).

Now because [the gate is] narrow, and filled with tribulation is the way that leads to life, **they are few who find it** (Mt. 7:14; RNT; emphasis added).

Remember the word that I (Christ) said to you (members of the true body of Christ), 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, **they will also persecute you ...** (Jn. 15:20a; cf. Mt. 5:10, 12; Ac. 22:4; 26:11; 1Cor. 4:12; 2Cor. 4:9; Gal. 1:13, 23; 1Thess. 2:15; Rev. 12:13; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

But seeing the multitudes, he (Christ) had compassion concerning them because **they were being troubled** (harassed) **and scattered** about, like sheep without a shepherd (Mt. 9:36; RNT; cf. Mk. 14:27; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

and not on behalf of the nation only, but also that **the children of God, the ones having been scattered**, he (Christ) may bring together (Jn. 11:52; RNT; cf. 16:32; Ac. 8:1, 4; 11:19; 1Pet. 1:1; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

The main reason that the true body of Christ is small, persecuted, and scattered is because it has to exist in a world that is presently manipulated by the god of this present age, Satan (2Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2), who has Almighty God's people as his main target. He wants to eliminate them because they believe in obeying God's law and commandments, and Satan wants to suppress this understanding,

Be sober (self-controlled), be vigilant (watchful); because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1Pet. 5:8; cf. Pro. 28:15; Ed. notes in parentheses).

Now when the dragon (symbol of Satan) saw that he had been cast to the earth (cf. Isa. 14:12-15; Eze. 28:16), he persecuted the woman (beginning with ancient Israel through whom Christ was

eventually born, and then the body of Christ following his death and resurrection) who gave birth to the male Child (Rev. 12:13; Ed. notes in parentheses).

And the dragon was enraged with the woman (the true body of Christ), and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, **who keep the commandments of God** (cf. Mt. 4:4) and have the testimony (Ex. 25:16) of Jesus Christ (Rev. 12:17; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

The true body of Christ will not stand out as an organization that endorses political parties, leaders, or governments because none of these entities use God's word as their foundation. Besides, true believers should only vote for the government of God to be established on earth (Mt. 6:10) and to date this government has been rejected (1Sam. 8:7), which is why it does not appear on any ballots at voting time,

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; **a good understanding have all those who do His commandments**... (Ps. 111:10; cf. Pro. 1:7; 9:10; Hos. 4:6; emphasis added).

Only God is qualified to determine who should rule over His subjects. Mankind is easily deceived and will inevitably make the wrong choices,

But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have refused (rejected) him (Saul). For the Lord does not see as man sees; for **man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart** (1Sam. 16:7; Ed. note in parentheses; emphasis added).

So the true body of Christ has not been easily recognized throughout man's history, nor is it today, for a number of reasons - some of which have been discussed in this study. Nonetheless, there have been many individuals who have done God's work and were even persecuted for it (Heb. 11:36-38), but they were not associated with one of this world's Christian churches, were not identified with a church name, and were not part of a large group, yet they stood up for God's law and commandments. Obedience to God's commands is a very unpopular principle in this world's institutions, whether secular or religious. In reality, it should be central to both of these (Ps.111:10).

This document is the collaborative work of individuals who believe God's truth should be given freely (Mt. 10:8; 1Cor. 2:12; 2Cor.11:7; Rom. 10:14-21) and the message of the one true God should be made available to all nations (Mt. 24:14) as a prerequisite to the return of Jesus Christ as King of kings (Mt. 17:10; 19:17; Mk. 9:11; Lk. 1:17; Rev. 19:11-16).

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