

BC 29 – Part 1 – What does the True Church Look Like?

Brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ: If you drive around Scarborough there are many Presbyterian churches. And we are a Presbyterian church. But we are not the same. What is the difference? After all, our names are similar. We are very, very different from many of the Presbyterian churches around!

How do you know that New Horizon is a true church? How can you discern the true church if you travel or move? And you need to discern the true church! After all, man is obligated by God to join the church. Knowing you need help to discern the true church, God gives help.

Our headings are:

Principles of the Marks of the True Church

Details of the Marks of the True Church.

Our goals are: That **you will be trained to recognize the true Christian church wherever you go, you will become attached to it,** and **that you then work for the building up of the church.**

Principles of Recognizing the True Church

We believe that we ought **diligently and circumspectly to discern** from the Word of God which is the true Church, since all sects which are in the world assume to themselves the name of the Church. But we speak not here of **hypocrites, who are mixed in the Church** with the good, yet are not of the Church, though externally in it; but we say that the body and communion of the true Church must be distinguished from all sects that call themselves the Church.

1. There are 2 types of churches about which you read in the Bible, the local church and the universal church.

a. The universal church is made up of people from all ages, of all countries, and it is innumerable.

b. The local church is where there is a definite group of Christians, ruled by elders, so there are not private churches.

And you can't call something a church if there were no members.

2. Since the true local church is visible and findable, you have to look for it.

Churches are not secret organization. Cults are secretive. Lodges are secretive. Churches are in the public's eye.

3. God's Word gives you directions for finding a true local church.

So you must not look for where people "feel" loved, or where your friends are, or where people are happy, or which church is close to your home. Let God's Word guide you!

You should not identify a church as Christian because you see a sign in front of it. It is contempt of God if you think so.

You must not be indifferent and think that all “churches” are the same.

4. You have to look diligently and carefully for the true church.

“Diligently” means to work zealously to know the true and false church.

“Very carefully” (circumspectly means to work with precision.

Many sects (Mormons, JW’s etc) which use Christ’s name pretend to be Christians but are not part of the true church.

Sects are groups that propagate some seriously false teaching. It is often difficult to recognize sects because they preach, sing, baptize, give the Lord’s Supper, and take up tithes and offerings...so you must be careful.

Further, these false teachers and sects will exist– and they will be...to some extent...be effective.

Matthew 7:15 - "**Beware of false prophets**, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.

Matthew 24:5 - "For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will **deceive many**."

Acts 20:29-30 - "For I know this, that after my departure **savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.** 30 "Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.

2Peter 2:1 - But there were also **false prophets** among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies...

Look how many people follow the Jehovah’s Witnesses or the Mormons!

5. Be careful not to confuse the cults with churches that have hypocrites.

Romans 9:6 - But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel,

The true church always has hypocrites-people who pretend to be Christians but are not. Hypocrites originally meant “actors.”

Hypocrites are like chaff; they are not like good food often have pests on them. Chaff will be **burned up in the end.**

Hypocrites are like grass. You will always find grass with the wheat. Young wheat and grass look alike, so **you will have to wait until harvest time** for the wheat to be separated from the grass. Then the grass is burned up.

Hypocrites are like cancer. Cancer may be in the body, but it is not a part of the body. It is the **cancer that must be removed.**

Details of Recognizing the True Church

The marks by which the true Church is known are these: If the **pure doctrine of the gospel** is preached therein; if it maintains the **pure administration of the sacraments** as instituted by Christ; if **church discipline is exercised in chastening of sin**; in short, if all things are managed according to the pure Word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the Church. Hereby the true Church may certainly be known, from which no man has a right to separate himself. As for the false Church, it ascribes more power and authority to itself and its ordinances than to the Word of God, and will not submit itself to the yoke of Christ. Neither does it administer the sacraments as appointed by Christ in His Word, but adds to and takes from them, as it thinks proper; it relies more upon men than upon Christ; and persecutes those who live holily according to the Word of God and rebuke it for its errors, covetousness, and idolatry.

These two Churches are easily known and distinguished from each other.

1. If you call something “true” it means that there are counterfeit things.

So be aware! You can have true money in your pocket, but you have to be aware of counterfeit money. So how do you recognize the true church and avoid false churches?

Roman Catholics believe that among other things, the marks of the church are: the **ability to do miracles**, have **large number of members**, **seeing bad things happening to your enemies**, **have Popes**, etc. These are counterfeit marks of the church. This is why the Roman church is a counterfeit church.

What are other counterfeit marks of the church? Some people will say we are a true church because **we have many people**, or we **have many programs**, or we **raise a lot of money for missions**, we are **socially active** and **help the poor**. Wrong.

2. The church is a place where pure doctrine is regularly and faithfully preached.

a. It is not a matter of whether there is preaching (there is preaching everywhere – even in Mormon churches. Jim Jones preached every week in Guyana), but whether there is **pure preaching**. There is no adding or subtracting from God’s Word, but a right dividing of God’s Words.

2Timothy 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, **rightly dividing the word of truth.**

The people hear of Christ life, death (active and passive obedience), and his resurrection as foundation of all sermons. Simply put, pure **preaching is listening to the Good News of Christ.**” This is what makes the church strong.

Ephesians 2:20 having been built on the **foundation** of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the **chief cornerstone**,

And because true church never gets used to the sound of millions of feet tramping to everlasting hell fire, she preaches the Gospel to the lost as well.

3. The church is a place where there is pure administration of the sacraments of Christ.

a. Christ instituted 2 sacraments (Roman Catholics made up seven) which may not be neglected. (Some churches have no sacraments or they give the sacraments to anyone who asks.)

b. In the true church there is no superstition in the sacraments. (The Anglicans and even Lutherans have this.) In the true church the sacraments must be done **in the way that Christ says**. This is why **we don't baptize dead people**.

c. The Lord table is fenced so that non-believers or believers in poor standing are not allowed to participate.

1 Corinthians 11:27-29 - Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. 28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For **he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself**, not discerning the Lord's body.

Acts 19:4 Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that **they should believe on Him** who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus." 5 **When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.**

This is not an indifferent matter. De Bres, the writer of the Belgic Confession was murdered by Romanists because he celebrated the Lord's Supper with Reformed Christians. We only **baptize believers and their children**.

4. The church is a place where discipline is properly exercised.

a. Discipline is not for personal vendettas... The Roman Catholics punished people because they preached the truth they didn't want to hear. This is how Luther was pushed out of the church and John Hus were burned at the stake by Roman Catholics...and others in England.

b. The true church "practices church discipline for correcting faults" to make the church holy – clean and pure. In order to practice discipline when it is needed, God appoints

elders in true churches. The church therefore has an obligation to find out about people's business if it is a matter of SIN. Don't resist your pastor and elders when they ask you about your life.

1 Corinthians 5:4-5 - In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, 5 deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Titus 3:10 - **Reject a divisive man** after the first and second admonition,

2Thessalonians 3:6 - But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you **withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly** and not according to the tradition which he received from us.

5. If you eliminate or diminish 1 of these 3 marks, the other 2 will diminish as well.

So attending a church simply because there is a good preacher is not enough. You have to look for all 3 marks...that they are done properly.

6. And in the true church the members will continually be searching the Scriptures to make sure the elders are faithfully teaching from God's Word.

Acts 7:11 These 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.

Conclusion:

The true church is always **visible**. You have to **follow the directions of God's Word to find it**. The true church is marked **by faithful preaching** of the Word of God, the **proper administering of the sacraments**, and the **orderly exercising of discipline**. You have to keep your eyes on these marks. These marks are like your CN Tower that give you your bearings. Don't be fooled by churches that have one or two marks.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

1. When the preaching, sacraments, and discipline are good, you will be saved from falling in the traps of cults like Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism, and Seventh Day Adventists, you will mature in the faith, you will give birth to other spiritual children (or try to), and you will never separate yourself from it. And if the church ever strayed from the truth, **you would try to purify it** and get it back in the right way.

2. If you are not a member of the church of Jesus Christ and you believe that Jesus is the Lord of your life, you have to carefully look for the true church – where there is good preaching, proper sacraments, and consistent discipline. (Not all places where they read the Bible,

sing songs, or have a cross are Christian churches.) Nothing else but the pure church will please the Lord. I pray today that you will search for, find, and join Christ's church.

Finally, if Jesus is not Lord of your life, ask him to be Lord of your life. He paid for the lives enslaved by sin with his precious blood. Will you accept his offer? If you do, you will be joined to his body and serve him.