

*You are not the first person to begin such a search and neither will you be the last. There are many different kinds of churches in this world, all of them with a little different message, and some of them with a very different message.*

*How does one find the kind of church Jesus organized during his own personal ministry? This is such a confusing issue, but the Bible has the answer. Trust in God, and faithfully follow his word. God will reveal his kind of church to you.*

## **WHAT NOT TO LOOK FOR IN A CHURCH**

### **Friendliness**

This may sound strange, as God's people should and will be friendly. Being friendly is not the most important quality of a church. Friendliness can be found in all religious and non-religious groups. Do not make the mistake of assuming that a religious body is teaching Bible doctrines because they happen to be "nice and friendly". Religious cults are notorious for practicing what is known as "love-bombing", that is, where a potential member is hugged, fed, given the impression that everything is pleasurable, involved in endless discussions and receives constant attention. Someone has rightly called this practice, "heavenly deception."

In addition, we can all attest that there are some very friendly and caring people in the world.

### **Support and Encouragement**

Members of local churches should be supportive. There is also support, encouragement, a listening ear, a pat on the back, financial help, etc., in virtually every group of people that exists, religious and non-religious.

Do not make the mistake of thinking, "these people supported me, therefore, God automatically approves them." God has revealed that even sinners can be very encouraging and supportive.

I Kings 21:4-7, 25 reveals that King Ahab had a very wicked wife, and yet no one can say that she wasn't "supportive". Our society is filled with various support groups, and people do benefit from them, but "support" is a quality that lost and saved, saint and sinner, right and wrong, all give. Even the devil can be very "supportive."

We need to realize something about "support and encouragement". God commands in Galatians 6:2 that Christians "*Bear one another's burdens.*" Galatians 6:5 completes the picture of burden bearing by stating, "*For every man shall bear his own burden*".

### **Eloquent, Enthusiastic, Entertaining, Charismatic Speakers...**

From the beginning of time, many have fallen into the trap of being enthralled with the messenger without paying attention to the message. Some of the most charismatic speakers are found on the side of evil. From Genesis 3 and Matthew 4, we learn that the devil is a very persuasive and smooth talking speaker. So was Jonadab, 2 Samuel 13:3, who counseled Amnon to rape his half sister, Tamar.

God's children are warned in Romans 16:18 about a class of men who, "*...serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple*".

In contrast to human religious leaders that look "polished", we find some

individuals in the Bible who would not fit such a mold.

- Isaiah 53:2 states concerning Jesus Christ, *“...he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.”* Those qualities many believe are requisite for leadership were not found in Christ
- 1 Corinthians 2:1 declares concerning the speech of Apostle Paul, *“And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.”*
- I Corinthians 2:3-4 states concerning Paul’s personal appearance and charisma, *“And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. 4 And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power:”*
- II Corinthians 10:10 declares what others said about the Apostle Paul, *“For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.”*

The warning is clear, don’t be overly impressed about a man’s appearance, presentation, or delivery, but really listen to see if he is preaching the truth.

### **Fun, Games, Recreation, Entertainment**

Some religious groups seek to lure people in by a flurry of social activities. Church sponsored potlucks, ski-trips, bowling parties, dances, etc. The truth is, all groups, religious and non-religious offer these types of things. When we open the Bible, we find the New Testament church refuses to use “fun and games” to draw or keep members. Paul rebuked the Corinthians in I Corinthians 11:22 for turning the Lord’s Supper into a potluck by saying, *“What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not.”* What would Paul say about a congregation who wants to build a place of worship with the Lord’s funds that can be quickly transformed into a gymnasium or dining room 15 minutes after the worship of God is over? Have twentieth century religious bodies found a loophole in Paul’s teaching?

### **Preaching that doesn’t require you to change...**

If you are looking for a religion that doesn’t require much of you, that involves little personal and monetary sacrifice on your part, then you will find plenty of religious groups that will be very eager to accommodate you. Most religions today preach a religion of ease and convenience, a religion of pleasantness, happiness, and prosperity. The people of God in both the Old and New Testaments had to constantly battle those who preached a “religion of convenience”.

Isaiah 5:20 declares, *“Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! 21 Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! 22 Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink: 23 Which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him!”*

Isaiah 30:10 declares that the rebellious people commanded their prophets and preachers, *“See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits:”*

Jeremiah 6:14 states that the prophet and the priest prophesy falsely and *“They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace.”*

II Timothy 4:3 declares that New Testament saints also want their preachers and pastors to give them soothing words. *“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; 4 And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.”*

Religious groups will always exist, which are only too eager to inform you that you don't have to have Scriptural baptism, even though the Bible commands it. Mark 16:16. You don't have to give up your sinful ways, even though Acts 17:30 states *“And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:”* You don't have to be faithful in church attendance. Forget that Hebrews 10:25 declares, *“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”*

There were religious teachers in every century who encouraged people to continue in their sinful practices. II Peter 2:18, 19 states, *“For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. 19 While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.”* Jude 4 states, *“For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Don't be surprised when you find certain religious bodies which permit and or defend sex outside of marriage, homosexual relationships, idolatry, drunkenness, profanity, and even murder (abortion/suicide). 1 Corinthians 6:6-10; Ephesians 5:4-6 makes it very clear that God does not approve of any of these things!

When you are tempted to follow a messenger who says, “we only preach positive and uplifting lessons”, remember: many of the greatest sermons recorded in the Bible didn't end on a positive note. Peter's sermon on Pentecost, Acts 2:36, ends with: *“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.”* Stephen's sermon, Acts 7:51-53, ends with: *“Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. 52 Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: 53 Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it. 54 When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.”* Paul's sermon on Mars hill, Acts 17:30-31, ends with: *“And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: 31 Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he*

*bath given assurance unto all men, in that he bath raised him from the dead.”*

Each of the above features is important in any church, but they are also important in *every* successful organization, religious or secular. Churches are spiritual organizations; therefore churches have requirements in *addition* to the above-mentioned items. When you are looking for a church home, you want a church that has all the good qualities listed above, but most importantly, you want a church that is spiritual, a church that will lead you in a closer walk with Jesus Christ.

## **WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A CHURCH**

In this short article, I will not be able to state every factor a person should look for in a church, but I will give a short summary of Bible doctrines necessary to any true church. Also, please understand that doctrines alone do not make a true church. A church can have all the right doctrines, but if that church does not put Christ first, it is not a true church. Jesus told the doctrinally sound church at Ephesus, Revelation 2:1-7, that because they had left their first love (the love for God and his ways – see Matthew 22:34-40) their candlestick (authority to be a light for God) would be removed.

The presence of God is what constitutes a true church. A church does not have to be perfect, but they must put God first in all things.

### **The Truth About The Bible**

Every person should attend and be a member of a church that believes the Bible is the Word of God. The King James Bible is the Bible for all English speaking people. A true church of the Lord Jesus Christ will believe God verbally inspired holy men of old, and that God has preserved his word for us today. II Timothy 3:16, 17 declares, *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: 17 That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”*

A true church body will believe, preach and practice the truths contained in the Bible. The true church body will believe the Bible is the final, supreme authority by which they should live, and the Word by which a most Holy God shall judge us. True churches will fellowship together, their fellowship being centered on the Word of God.

When you attend services, you should expect the pastor to read, and give understanding to the teachings of the Bible, both generally and specifically. The pastor will encourage both members and visitors to read, meditate and use the Bible as a daily guide for Christian living.

### **The Truth About Jesus Christ**

In a true church, the pastor will preach Jesus Christ clearly and consistently. The personality of Jesus Christ will be the predominate personality of the church.

There will be no doubt that Jesus Christ is the virgin born, only begotten Son of God, as stated in John 3:16, *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”*

It should be clearly taught that Jesus Christ was God before he was born in Bethlehem, and that he remains God until this very day. I John 4:1-3 states, *“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. 2 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: 3 And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.”* A church that leaves any doubt concerning who Jesus Christ is, and what he came to do should be considered a false church.

Jesus Christ was not just a good man, or a prophet. Jesus was and is the only begotten son of God, and according to Philippians 2:6-8, he was with God and equal to God before he was born in Bethlehem. *“Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: 7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: 8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”* Jesus Christ willingly died, taking our sins upon himself that he might give us eternal life and his righteousness.

In the true church a pastor will preach, concerning the Godhead, that there are three parts of the one true God: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. These three are one and are equal in every divine attribute.

The work of the three parts of the trinity will be clearly and consistently taught. I Peter 1:2 states, *“Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.”* God the Father elects sinners to salvation, who are saved by the blood of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit of God separating (sanctifying) them to salvation.

### **The Truth Concerning the Gospel**

According to I Corinthians 15:1-4, the gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. *“Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; 2 By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. 3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; 4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:”*

In a true church it will be plainly taught that every person is totally depraved and needs Jesus Christ as their personal saviour and Lord. The gospel will be preached and the lost will be urged to receive the free gift of salvation.

### **The Truth of Baptism**

After salvation, individuals will be urged to submit themselves to scriptural baptism by the authority given to that local church by the Lord Jesus Christ. Scriptural baptism is more than “dunking” a person in water, but involves (1) a saved person (2) being completely immersed in water (3) by the authority of a scriptural Baptist church (4) for the purpose of proclaiming the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the individual’s commitment to a lifetime of faithfulness to God.

### **The Truth of Faithfulness**

The true church will preach faithfulness to the Lord Jesus Christ. Faithfulness involves many things, as stated in the church covenant.

“We also engage to maintain family and secret devotion; to religiously educate our children; to seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintances; to walk circumspectly in the world; to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our deportment; to avoid all tattling, backbiting, and excessive anger; to abstain from the sale and use of intoxicating drinks as a beverage, and to be zealous in our efforts to advance

the kingdom of our Saviour.

“We further engage to watch over one another in brotherly love; to remember each other in prayer; to aid each other in sickness and distress; to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and courtesy in speech; to be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation, and mindful of the rules of our Saviour to secure it without delay.”

### **The Truth Concerning Separation From Worldliness**

The true church will continually urge the scripturally baptized believer to separate themselves from the wickedness and sin of this present evil world. I Corinthians 5:9-10 states, *“I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: 10 Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world.”*

The negative aspect of separation teaches that believers should have nothing to do with wickedness or sin. Wild parties, drinking alcohol, using tobacco, using drugs, cursing, stealing, shoplifting, telling dirty jokes and other such examples of wickedness are preached against and stood against. Of course, true believers do not want to have anything to do with wickedness. When believers received eternal life, they also received a hatred for their former life, and a love for the things of God.

The positive aspect of separation teaches believers can enjoy sports, shopping, working, and playing in the various activities of this world. In short, God intends for the believer to enjoy this present world, yet never partake of its sins. Ecclesiastes 2:24 affirms, *“There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God.”*

While all these “earthly” activities can and should be enjoyed, the focal point of the believer’s life is on Christ, not on activities. God intends his people to enjoy this world and the fruit of their labors.

The true church of the Lord Jesus Christ lives and preaches separation from the world. Separation is not just physical, but is separation in the heart and mind. True separation involves a complete dedication to the things of God – and enjoying every minute of it.