

WHAT IS THE TRUE CHURCH?

First it is essential to mark the distinction between "the church" and local "churches." According to the Bible, "the church" is not an organization at all. Referred to as "the church, which is his body" in Ephesians 1:22,23, it includes every true believer in Christ from the first century A.D. until the return of Christ for His saints (1 Corinthians 12:12-14). So, "the church" is not to be thought of as a denomination.

However, it is obvious that there are hundreds of different types of local church-es. The Bible records the founding of the very first local church in Acts 2:41-47 and mentions many others (Galatians 1:2; Revelation 1:4). But how are we to identify which local churches are true? Millions of sincere souls have been persuaded that theirs is the only true church. It is truly amazing how many "one true" churches there are!

Clearly, whatever its claims, its name, its structure, or its size, if a local church is true it must be teaching and practicing truth. And since the Bible calls itself "the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15), we must conclude that a true church will be a Bible oriented church. For example, a true church will enthusiastically affirm exclusive Biblical authority (2 Timothy 3:16,17), the existence of but one true God (Isaiah 43:10), the full deity of Jesus Christ from eternity past through eternity future (Hebrews 13:8), and the total inability of man to contribute in any way toward the earning of eternal life (Romans 8:7,8).

A true church would never teach that anyone is saved by joining it. Acts 4:12 is a reference to Christ, not an organization. It says:

"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

A local church that is true to the Word of God will insist that eternal life becomes ours only by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8,9). Any religion which would lead its followers astray on this is not only incorrect, it is spiritually lethal and must be avoided if we value our eternal life.

The function of a trustworthy local church is to provide instruction from the Bible, fellowship with like-minded believers, and avenues of Christian service for those who have been saved by grace. May God help you to seek out and benefit from the ministry of such a congregation.

Lloyd A. Larkin
Baptist Mid-Missions, Emeritus