

PART SEVENTH—THE IDENTITY OF THE CHURCH

INTRODUCTION: Lessons XXVIII to XXXV deal with the identity of the Church. The Church of Christ is not only singular in the fact of its oneness but also in its distinction and separateness from every human institution on earth. Built by a divine pattern which must not be corrupted, it is not human in any of its characteristics, but stands out from the world and all human organizations in Name, Worship, Doctrine, Work, and Organization. The adoption of human names, creeds, practices, or organizations will denominationalize the Church and bring upon those participating therein the displeasure of God. It is the obligation of every Christian to maintain and preserve the separate and distinct character of God's Church not only apart from the institutions of men but also in protecting the purity of its character from contamination with ungodliness and worldliness.

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I. "Build According to the Pattern" (Heb. 8:5):

1. We are workers or builders together with God (I Cor. 3:8, 9).
2. We must follow God's plan or pattern revealed through:
 - a. Teachings of Christ and Apostles (Matt. 28:18, 20). The things received to be our guide (Phil. 4:9).
 - b. Examples of churches of New Testament days (I Thess. 1:6, 9).
3. God will refuse to recognize houses built by human plans (Matt. 15:13; 7:21-23; Psa. 127:1).

II. Measuring the Church by Human Standards:

1. Various reasons offered to justify existence of sectarian efforts in religion: "Doing some good," "Good people in it," "Teaches some truth" "Enjoyable association," etc. As much can be said for every fraternal organization and most human institutions in the world.
2. Such claims for divine recognition are:
 - a. Dishonoring to God. Reduces God's ways to a level with human ways (Isa. 55:8, 9).
 - b. Disrespectful to His Word. No justification in part of the truth being taught when another part is disrespected.
 - c. Deceiving to untaught men, satisfying them with unscriptural efforts which God will not recognize.

III. The Church Measured By the Divine Standard:

1. The word of God the measuring reed (Rev. 11:1). By it the temple is to be measured. When God's Word is the guide the House is built upon the

rock and will stand (Matt. 7:24-27). Our efforts are to be judged by Word of God revealed through Christ (Jn. 12:47-49).

2. Compare the Church to which you belong with the Church described in the New Testament in the following points:
 - a. Name. Can you find the name you wear in the New Testament?
 - b. Worship. Are you following the doctrines of men (Matt. 15:7-9)?
 - c. Doctrine. Do you teach only what Christ and the Apostles taught (Gal. 1:6- 11)?
 - d. Organization. Are you trying to serve Christ through human organizations?
 - e. Mission. Is the work of the Church confined to the divine mission?
 - f. Character. Does the Church demand purity of life and character?

IV. Losing Divine Recognition:

1. The Church is God's house or family — a people for God's own possession (I Pet. 2:5- 9).
2. Peculiarity and singularity must be maintained in order to be acknowledged and approved by the Lord (Titus 2:11-14).
3. As good soldiers must not become entangled in affairs of the world (II Tim. 2:4). Church must not be subservient to political, economic or social purposes.
4. To corrupt God's Plan in any point is to lose identity.
 - a. The example of the Ephesian Church (Rev. 2:4, 5). Candlestick to be removed (Rev. 1:20). Candlestick represented the identity of the Church. Divine recognition to be withdrawn.
5. To not be identified with the Lord and his people is fatal in the last day (Matt. 7:22-23), "Depart, I never knew you."

Conclusion: We must strive lawfully if we would be crowned (II Tim. 2:5). Let us therefore do God's work in God's own way.

Questions For Discussion

1. How must the Church be built?
2. In identifying the Church, what pattern of teaching, authority, and examples is to be followed?
3. Name some fallacious reasons that are offered to justify the existence of denominations.

4. Now show how such claims are dishonoring, disrespectful to God's word, and mislead the untaught.
5. What is the divine standard of measurement?
6. In what things should one compare the Church to which he belongs to be certain to find the true Church?
7. What is the Church?