

**Question: What are the characteristics of the church to which you should belong?**

The church that Jesus promised to build and to save is indeed the church to which you should belong. The church is made up of the redeemed of God. They are the people whom God has forgiven of sin and added to His family, house and kingdom. So when you ask, "What are the characteristics of the church?" I can only reply, "They are the people who have symbolically washed their robes in the blood of Christ, and who follow His teaching and example in their lives" (cf. Mt 16:16-19; 1Ti 3:15; Ep 5:23; Ep 1:7; Co 1:14; Re 1:5; 7:14).

**The question above, though, inquires as to the identifying marks of the Lord's church in a local sense. Get your Bible out and note the following characteristics:**

- It is organized after the New Testament pattern with "elders, deacons and saints" (Ph 1:1).
- It (each congregation) is independent and self-ruling under Christ as its head (1 Pe 5:1-2).
- It recognizes no earthly head and belongs to no association of churches (Ep 1:22-23).
- Its collective work and worship, and the personal conduct of its members, are guided and governed by New Testament teaching (2 Jn 9; 2 Pe 1:3).

**In accordance with the New Testament, Christians who comprise a local church observe the following in its collective worship:**

- The Lord's Supper each first day of the week (Mt 26:26-30; Ac 20:7; 1 Co 11:23-29).
- The singing of hymns in praise to God (Ep 5:19; Co 3:16).
- The unceasing prayers of saints (Ac 12:5).
- The study of the scriptures (Ac 15:7-21)
- The free-will contribution to the Lord's work (1 Co 16:1-2).

**In respect to the work of a local church, the New Testament teaches that it has God-given responsibility in the following areas:**

- To preach the gospel according to its own ability (Ph 4:14-16)
- To provide spiritual teaching to its own members (Ep 4:15-16)
- To provide benevolent assistance for its own needy (Ac 6)
- To provide benevolent assistance to Christians in other places (1 Co 16:1-2; 2 Co 8, 9)

In closing, as the early Christians "went everywhere preaching the word" (Ac 8:4), so do 21<sup>st</sup> Century Christians. As the gospel is planted in the hearts of honest men and women (Lk 8:11; Ro 1:16), and they obey it from the heart (Ro 6:17-18), they are set free from sin and born anew into the kingdom of God (Jn 3:1-5; Ro 6:1-7), and thus the church of the Lord Jesus Christ continues to grow and do its work.

If the characteristics stated above do not describe your church, then ask your leaders for the reasons why. Consider the following verses as you listen to their answers (Isa 8:20; Ga 1:8; 2 Jn 9). It is logical, and we should agree, that the church described in the New Testament is the church to which we all should belong. And we should also agree that there is no need for 2000 years of human creedal tradition to be attached to it? But is it possible? Absolutely, every one of us who say we believe in Christ Jesus, ought to be striving for unity based on that logic. "There is one body and one Spirit, ...one hope...one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all..." (Ep 4:1-6).

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