

FIND A CHURCH OF CHRIST NEAR YOU!

Many times on this program you have heard me say, "Find a church of Christ near you where you can find someone who will assist you in obeying Jesus Christ." If you have never known about the church of Christ then how will you be able to find one? Will there be a sign somewhere on a building where the church of Christ meets? Well, yes, you may find a sign. But more important than a sign is the love and the practice of the people who meet there! That's right! So how will you go about identifying the church of Christ? What does it look like? How can you know a church of Christ when you find it?

Hello I'm Larry Murdock. I preach for the church of Christ at Gandy.

The New Testament of Jesus Christ provides us with many identifying marks of a mature church of Christ, and also an infant church of Christ. You see, Jesus' teaching also gives us some insight into recognizing an immature church. That's right! Jesus' apostle Paul wrote to the church of Christ at Ephesus that "...Speaking the truth in love, we (church members) are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body (the church), joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love." ([Ephesians 4:15-16 ESV](#)) You see, every church of Christ will be found somewhere between childhood and adulthood, depending upon the maturity of those Christians who make up the local congregation. But notice Paul's method producing and gauging maturity: "Speaking the truth in love we are to grow up...." The more of Jesus' truth we know, the more we can speak in love. When church members grow in the knowledge of the truth, the more love a church will generate for the One who loves them. Jesus said that the greatest command is to **...Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all our mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.** ([Matthew 22:37-40 ESV](#)) Jesus also promised those who believe in Him and love Him, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:32)

So when you go looking for the church of Christ, you need to be looking for Jesus' truth wrapped up in an atmosphere of love. Jesus told his disciples, **By this (love)**

all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."
(John 13:35 ESV)

In that same letter to the Ephesian church of Christ, Jesus' apostle Paul explained how it happened that Jesus' people could love and know the truth. Paul says that "When he (Jesus) ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men. ...And he gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes." (Ephesians 4:8-14 NKJV)

So here Paul tells us the means by which Jesus dispensed "truth". Jesus' truth came through inspired men. Jesus gave "gifts" to men. Some received the gift of apostleship. Some became prophets, some became evangelists; others were shepherds (elders, pastors) and still others were teachers. Jesus' "truth" was given to these people so the saints (church members) could be equipped "for the work of ministry." The word "minister" means to serve, or dispense, or spread. A minister gives away something. Jesus' minister gives away Jesus' truth! The "work of ministry", then, is the work of spreading or dispensing Jesus' truth. You see, the saints (church members) were to take the place of those inspired men. That's right! The apostles, prophets, inspired evangelists and inspired elders and teachers would die. The church members were then to become the ministers of truth! This dispensing of truth, or this work of ministry, would result in the "building up of the body" of Christ, which is the church. The final purpose of all this truth being dispensed was so that the children of God could grow to manhood and become as tall as the stature of Christ! Indeed, the children of God, church members, are supposed to become like Christ! And they are supposed to love like Christ!

However, the final purpose for this "work of ministry", this "teaching of truth in love" is to set every Christian free! That's right! Free from the waves that toss people around. Free from every wind of doctrine that first blows this way, but then changes direction and blows another way. And what is the source of these tossing waves and windy teaching? Why, the source is human cunning. Human

craftiness laid out in deceitful schemes! Have you ever thought of false teaching as a tossing wave or a wind of doctrine that comes from the trickery of men? Of course, Satan is the ultimate source of falsehood.

Some people think that the **ONLY** mark of a true church of Christ is Love. And a church's love should be the first thing that people see when they walk into an assembly of the true church of Christ. It is as Jesus predicted, **By this (love) all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.**" (John 13:35 ESV) Therefore, it is absolutely essential that every one of Jesus' church members "put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander" (1 Peter 2:1 ESV). Peter, writing to church members, also said, "Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart...." (1 Peter 1:22 NKJV) Yes, love is an outstanding mark of a true church of Christ.

However, love is **not** the most important identifying mark! That's right! Pagans can love each other. Sinners can love each other. Whiskey drinkers love each other. Adulterers love each other. Fornicators love each other. Swindlers love each other. Every "club" in the world can love each other. But their "love" does **not** mark them as members of Christ!

A member of Christ's body is recognized by the TRUTH they believe and practice! It is the TRUTH that makes us free, and in that truth we rejoice with those who believe and obey the truth of Jesus Christ. It was by obeying the truth that our souls were purified unto a "sincere love of the brethren." Peter wrote, "Love the brotherhood." (1 Peter 2:17) That is a brotherhood of people who believe and obey the truth of Jesus Christ. In fact, it is that TRUTH that sanctifies the church, that sets it aside from everything else. That's right!

The night before His crucifixion Jesus prayed to his Father for those men who would receive His gifts of inspiration. Jesus prayed, **But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.**" (John 17:13-17 ESV) The word "sanctify" means to set apart for a special

task. Jesus wanted his apostles and prophets to be set apart for the special task of teaching and preaching His Truth. And by teaching and preaching Jesus' truth those apostles and prophets would be noticeably different from the world's thinking and practice.

Friends, the church of Christ today must carry on this distinction in the world. Jesus also prayed for those who would believe on Jesus through the preaching and teaching of those inspired men. The teaching of the church must be noticeably different from the world around us. When you are looking for a church of Christ then look at the teaching and see that it agrees with the **truth** that Jesus and His apostles taught. How thankful we should be that people can do this! Yes, you can read the New Testament of Jesus Christ and then locate the people who believe and obey it! But you will have to study the word of Christ for yourself so that you can recognize the word of Christ when you hear it and when you see it in practice.

Jesus prayed for you and me in our quest to know His truth. After praying for his apostles and prophets he continued his prayer to His Father, "**As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me."** (John 17:18-21 ESV) How may the world know that the Father sent Jesus? Not only by the **love** but also by the **truth** that lives in the members of His church!

Oh, how thankful I am that I can read the New Testament and learn what the TRUTH is. When you know the truth, friends, then you can search and find a church of Christ near you. You can see for yourself whether that church believes and practices the Truth found in the pages of Jesus' New Testament. Or, after reading and learning the truth of Christ, you can start a church of Christ in your own home by your obedience to Jesus Christ. Then you and your family can become a beacon for truth in your part of the world.