***The Church As God Designed It***

I want to talk to us for next few minutes concerning the topic **The Church As God Designed It**. You know, there are thousands upon thousands of religious bodies in America. However, out of this sea of confusion there can only be but one church identified as the New Testament church. How is that one would identify the church as God designed it? The dictionary defines "identify" in the following manner: *"sameness of essential character . . . The condition of being the same with something described or asserted; or to establish the identity of stolen goods."* This means that if we want to identify something we have to point out the distinguishing marks or characteristics of the thing to be identified. To illustrate: Suppose you were seeking your car that had just been stolen. To give only the year in which your car was made would not be sufficient. To simply give the style and color would not be sufficient. There are many other models bearing the same year, style, and color. However, if you were to give the year, style, color, VIN number, along with the license plate number you have properly identified it because no other automobile will bear all these marks of identity. And that's the way it is with the Lord's church. If we want to identify it we must examine its identifying characteristics. For example, we do not look for one that simply worships. All churches worship. We do not look for one that loves the Lord. All but Satanic churches claim to love Him. We have to be much more detailed and specific in our description. Therefore, let us now turn to the pages of God's Holy Word and notice several unique qualities and characteristics of **The Church As God Designed It**.

As the basis for our study I’d like to read from Matthew 16:13-20. Listen to what it says: **“13When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? 14And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. 15He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? 16And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. 17And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. 18And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. 19And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 20Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.”** There's no question, after reading these passages, that it was the intention of Jesus Christ to build a church. There are many people today who sing, talk, pray, and discuss the church, but they do not really understand it. Most people attempt to make the church fit their own ideas and ideals. They attempt to mold it in such a way as to conform it to their own carnal desires and ambitions. So which church bears His unmistakable trademark? Let's now take a detailed look at the qualities, traits, and characteristics of **The Church As God Designed It**.

**(1) Has A Perfect Builder:** First of all, the church of Christ as revealed on the pages of God's word has a perfect builder. But does it make any difference who builds the church? According to one source there are over 33,000 denominations in this country alone. Such facts demonstrate the lengths to which men will go to have their own way. But can just anybody go out and establish a church? Well, let’s find out. According to the text we just read the situation is the disciples of Jesus had been out teaching and preaching and when they came back Jesus asked them the question, *“Who do men say that I the Son of man am?”* Then He got down to the nitty-gritty and posed this question directly to the disciples, *“But whom say ye that I am?”* That’s when Peter made the great confession, *“Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God”*, and it was upon this great foundation of truth that the church was to be built. The church of Christ is different from all other churches in that it has a divine architect. Come with me now to Psalms 127:1 – **“Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.”** What is the Lord's house? 1 Timothy 3:15 identifies God's house as the church: "But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." So the Bible identifies the Lord's house as the Lord's church. The Lord’s house and the Lord’s church are one in the same. Regarding this church Jesus said in Matthew 15:13, **“Every plant which my heavenly father hath not planted shall be rooted up.”** Let me ask you a question: Do you want to be part of a church that’s going to be rooted up come Judgment Day? Of course you don’t! That just shows you the importance of the church having the right builder and that builder is Jesus Christ, the son of God! That’s the reason Paul could say in Romans 16:16, **“The churches of Christ salute you.”** The church I read about in the New Testament was built by Christ and is possessed by Christ. I need to appreciate that fact and so do you! The church of Christ is unique in that it has a perfect builder just as God intended! If Martin Luther builds a church, or Joseph Smith builds a church, or somebody else builds a church it’s not the Lord’s church, is it?! So I need to be a member of the church you can read about on the pages of inspiration! But also...

**(2) Rests On An Unshakable Foundation:** Not only does the church as God designed it have a perfect builder it also rests upon an unshakable foundation. By the way, do you think a foundation is important? When you built your house, did you put some emphasis on the foundation? It’s pretty important, isn’t it?! You know, the Bible emphasizes the value and the importance of the church’s foundation. Even in the Old Testament Isaiah prophesied about that foundation in Isaiah 28:16 – about how it be would a foundation upon which things would rest of a divine nature. Notice what he said: **“Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.”** And in Matthew 21 Jesus applies this prophecy to Himself – He’s the foundation! Verse 42 says, **"Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner."** Now if you don’t believe that look at 1 Corinthians 3:11 – **“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”** And so the church as God designed it is built upon an unshakable foundation, and that is, the truth concerning God's son Jesus Christ our Lord! But there’s another point I want to mention to you…

**(3) Has A Prophetic Origin:** Number three, the church as God designed it came into existence just as the Scriptures predicted. Somebody said, “What difference does that make?” Well, it makes a difference between what’s right and what’s wrong. It makes a difference between whether or not a church is a church of the Lord or not a church of the Lord. You see, it makes all the difference in the world! To help you appreciate that I take you this time to the book of Isaiah. In the book of Isaiah chapter 2 verses 2 through 4 the Messianic prophet is looking down the stream of time when he sees the coming or the establishment of what he calls the Lord’s house. Let me read that to you: **“2And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. 3And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.”** There are some very simple and basic things that you need to learn from that text. First of all, he says the Lord’s house is going to be built. What’s that? Well, we've already identified the Lord's house as the Lord's church and so when it talks about God’s house in the New Testament that’s the church. He also said this church would begin within a certain time frame – *“in the last days”* and go forth from *"Jerusalem"* and compose people of *"all nations"*. But did that ever actually happen? Did what Isaiah said take place? I believe it did. I take you this time to Acts chapter 2 – the apostles were commissioned by the Lord to go to (guess where)…the city of Jerusalem! To wait for the power on high – that is, the coming of the Holy Spirit – and Acts 2 records all of these events. First of all, Acts 2 pertains to the right object - the Lord's house or church according to verse 47 which says, "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." Secondly, Acts 2 includes the location of its establishment - "at Jerusalem." (Acts 2:5) Thirdly, Acts 2 identifies the correct people - "devout men out of every nation under heaven." (Acts 2:5) Finally, Acts 2 occurs within the timeframe God set - "in the last days" according to verse 17. Now when you add all of that up do you know what you've got? You've got the church as God designed it - nothing more, nothing less! But there's something else I want you to think about...

**(4) Submits To The Proper Authority:** Number 4, the church as God designed it follows the correct standard of authority – that’s very vital and important. In the book of Matthew 28:18 Jesus said, **“All power** (or authority) **is given unto me in heaven and in earth.”** In Matthew 7 it talks about how Jesus did not speak as the scribes or Pharisees, but as one having authority (Matt. 7:29). In John 7:46 they said, *“Never man spake like this man.”* Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, **“16All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: 17That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.”** In 1 Peter 4:11 Peter said, **“If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.”** So when I make this point it becomes apparent that we have no standard except the Bible, the word of God! And that’s one characteristic of the Lord's church. Unfortunately, you can’t say that about every church out there because not all churches follow that standard. However, we believe the Bible, the word of God, is the only standard and that it must be believed, obeyed, taught, and respected by all. Number 5...

 **(5) Wears The Correct Designation:** The church as God designed it wears the name God assigned. When you think about the church of Christ you need to appreciate that the members of the church of Christ wear a Bible name. You know, some people say, “There’s nothing in a name.” Do you really believe that? If you really think there’s nothing in a name just tell your employer to stop putting your name on your paychecks – instead just put my name on it! Would you do that? No! That’s because we all know there’s something important about a name and that’s why the Lord identified His people by name. There are three passages in the Old Testament that prophesied about this name and here they are: Isa. 56:5; 62:2; 65:15. And there are three in the New Testament: Acts 11:26; 26:18; 1 Pet. 4:16. For example, let’s read the one in Isaiah 56:5 – **“Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off.”** Now let’s go to Isaiah 62:2 – **“And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name.”** You see, there’s going to be a new name – never used before, brand new! When is that going to take place? *"When the Gentiles see God’s righteousness."* When did that happen? Well, I take you to Acts 10-11 where it talks about the conversion of Cornelius – the first Gentile convert. The prophet said when the Gentiles saw God’s righteousness His people would be called by a new name. And we find that in Acts 11:26. What did He call them? It says, **"The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch."** Somebody said, “Well, that's just a name of derision.” No, you can’t say that because Isaiah said God is going to call them that – it’s a divine calling! Now let’s look at Isaiah 65:15 (Remember, we’re still looking at some prophecies about this new name) – **“And ye shall leave your name for a curse unto my chosen: for the Lord God shall slay thee, and call his servants by another name.”** Do you remember when Paul preached to a man named Agrippa? When Paul got through with the sermon do you know what he said? He said, “**Almost thou persuadest me to be a** (Mormon? Baptist? Methodist? Catholic? Protestant? No, none of that!) **Christian.”** (Acts 26:28) You see, the name "Christian" is a name that glorifies the Lord! Peter said in 1 Peter 4:16, **“Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf** (in this name)**.”** And so the church as God designed it wears the name that God assigned it! But let me tell you something else about the church as God designed...

**(6) Has A Scriptural Organization:** Another unique aspect of the church that God designed is its organization. In the book of Philippians Paul gives a summary statement that helps us understand how the New Testament church is organized. Notice what it says: **“Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.”** The local church consists simply of (1) **Evangelists** or Preachers; (2) **Bishops** or Elders; and (3) **Saints** or Members. And that’s all!! Isn’t that simple?! The pastor system was unknown in New Testament times, but instead elders (plural) were appointed in every church to help shepherd or guide the flock. In Acts 14:23 Luke records, **"And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed."** These are men that meet the qualifications given in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. And those elders have a limited oversight. What is that limit? 1 Peter 5:2 says, **"Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind."** Furthermore, when you think about the organization of the church you have to distinguish between the local church and the universal church. The universal church has no work or organization (other than Christ being the head) that I know of. And no church in the New Testament ever handed over their responsibilities to another organization or surrendered their autonomy to another congregation. Somebody said, “Well, that’s just your opinion.” Come on, did I offer any opinion? No, I’ve just been reading to you right out of the Bible. I’ve given book, chapter, and verse for everything I’ve said, haven’t I?!

**(7) Offers Up Divine Worship:** Number 7, the church as God designed it offers up worship that is acceptable to the Lord. Somebody said, “Well, it doesn’t make any difference how I worship as long as I worship. I should be able to worship any way I choose.” In this country we have freedom of religion, right? It’s a free country! Well, so far it has been. So you have the legal right to worship how you want to, but that doesn’t make it pleasing to God. If you don’t believe me sit down a have a little talk with Nadab and Abihu. They were good men so far as I know – honest and sincere – but, God didn’t like how they worshipped. When you read the book of Leviticus chapter 10 verses 1 and 2 it says they offered what God considered strange fire. They may have thought that fire is fire, but it didn’t work. They didn’t get it from the right source. They did something that God did not tell them to do! They did something that He commanded them not! So how did God respond to that exactly? Let’s read it together: **“1And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not. 2And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.”** You see, God told them where to get the fire – from the altar (Lev. 16:12). So it does make a difference how we worship and you need to appreciate that. And that’s another thing that’s unique about the church of Christ. The church of Christ is correct in how it worships. But how do we know that somebody asked? Well, Jesus laid down some principles for worship when He said in John 4:24, **“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth** (That is, with the right attitude and according to the truth, the word of God – "thy word is truth" according to John 17:17)**.”** The elements or channels of worship are simple. According to Acts 2:42, “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” That would also include giving as Paul indicated in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 when he said, “1Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. 2Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.” In addition, the Lord’s Supper or Communion is to be observed on the 1st day of the week as seen in Acts 20:7 when the disciples met for that purpose. Preaching is also a part of New Testament worship according to that same passage. Look at it: “And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.” Prayer is another important element of worship according to Acts 12:5 when the church met to pray for Peter who was in prison at that time. Finally, they also did something else. Do you know what it was? They sang praises from the heart unto God. Hebrews 12:2 says, “In the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.” Also, Ephesians 5:19 says, "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." By the way, there are 10 verses in the New Testament that tell us to sing. Somebody said, “Well, what about mechanical instruments of music in worship?” Well, there’s just one thing wrong with it – the Bible doesn’t teach it. And the church of Christ is right in the fact that it worships exactly how God commanded – without addition or subtraction. Do you see that? It’s so easy and so simple that you can’t misunderstand it unless you have somebody to help you misunderstand it. But there's one more thing I want to call to you attention…

**(8) Serves A Heavenly Purpose:** Finally, the church as God designed it serves a high, holy, and heavenly purpose. Somebody said, “Does that really make any difference?” Yes, it does! First of all, what determines what the church does in its work? The standard is the Bible, the word of God! Paul said in Ephesians 4:11-12, **"11And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; 12For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."** According to that passage the work of Christ's church is remarkably simple and straightforward (almost deceivingly so) and consists of three things: (1) **Evangelism** – 1 Thess. 1:8 says, "For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing." (2) **Benevolence** – Acts 2:44-45 says, "44And all that believed were together, and had all things common; 45And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need." And, finally, (3) **Edification** – Acts 20:32 says, "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." By the way, no human institution was ever created to help the church accomplish its God-given work! The church that I read about on the pages of the New Testament did its own evangelism, relieved its own needy, and edified its own members without the complex arrangements found in modern-day protestant denominations. It is a self-edifying body capable of accomplishing all of its God given work as Ephesians 4:16 points out: **"From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."** Furthermore, it's message is focused on things that are of a spiritual nature. Instead of the food, fun, and frolic of the denominational world the church as God designed it draws men and women, boys and girls with the unleavened, unadulterated gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul said in 2 Thessalonians 2:14, **"Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."** Ladies and gentlemen, the gospel of Christ has drawing power. Jesus said, **"44No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. 45It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me."** The church as God designed it never resorted to games or gimmicks in order to draw folks in. Neither did Christ or His apostles authorize the use of "bait and switch" tactics that are so commonly employed by the denominational world as they seek to condescend to the lowest possible level in an effort to attract people through their carnal appetites. They simply preached the gospel in its purity and simplicity (and it got results)! That should come as no surprise because Romans 1:16 says, **“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”** If you would believe that gospel, repent of your sins, confess your faith, we’ll baptize you right now before we do anything else for the right reason – the remission of your sins – so you can have your sins washed away and become a member of the church as God designed it. And then, from that point forward, you can live righteously and Godly in this present world (Tit. 2:11-12) so that you can go to heaven when you die. If you’ve done that, but you need to come back through repentance, confession, and prayer like Simon did we can help you do that as well (Acts 8:22; 1 Jn. 1:9).