



It is certainly true that when I consider the Lord Jesus, there are many things about Him that intimidate me. I read about His holiness, His meekness, and His love, and it's sobering to realize that I'm supposed to imitate His greatness in all those things.

However, there are some things about Him that reassure me, and one of them is that He can be very sarcastic. Consider, for instance, the question of Luke 6:46. That's got some bite to it, doesn't it? His point is plain. If we call Him "Lord" but don't do what He says, we are no disciples of His at all.

This is important in our individual lives, and it's important in our corporate lives as members of a congregation. Is our congregation doing what Jesus says, or isn't it? Even a new Christian has to know how to distinguish churches that are from churches that aren't, so for our ninth half-hour study session, let's explore the topic of choosing a church.

Before I go on, let me note that the scope of this sermon is going to be limited, as the scope of every sermon in this series has been limited. This is not an explanation of every nuance of the work of the church. Instead, it's a guide to make sure that somebody who knows none of that will be headed in generally the right direction.

The first thing that we ought to do in evaluating a congregation is to ASK ABOUT BAPTISM. We see the centrality of baptism in the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20. Any church that truly is submitting to the Lordship of Jesus is going to do these two things. They are going to baptize, and they are going to teach those they baptize to observe all the commandments of Jesus.

Several weeks ago, we learned what the one baptism we are authorized to administer is. It is the immersion in water of a believer for forgiveness of sins. If a church administers that baptism, they are acting as authorized by Jesus. If they do not, they are not.

Furthermore, if a church does not administer the baptism of the Bible, its members do not enjoy the benefits of Bible baptism. They are not disciples. They are not Christians. They are not forgiven of their sins. They likely believe that they are, but they are deluded and mistaken. Assembling with a group of people like that has no more spiritual benefit than assembling with the Elks Lodge on Sunday morning.

The only way to find out the truth here is to ask. Go up to the preacher or the pastor or the whoever and ask three questions: "How do you baptize?", "Whom do you baptize?", and "Why do you baptize?"

Be very careful of weasel-word answers to the last question. Some will tell you things like, "We baptize because Jesus commanded us to." Usually, people who say such things do not believe in baptism for the forgiveness of sins, and the only way to smoke them out is to ask them directly, "Do you believe that baptism is necessary for forgiveness of sins?"

If you get any other answer than a "Yes," you know that the people in that church are not actually disciples, and you shouldn't worship there. There's no need to consider anything else in this lesson. Those people have flunked the most important Scriptural test.

Second, we ought to EVALUATE THEIR WORSHIP. Once again, the words of Jesus set the standard. He tells us what the worship of His people is like in John 4:23-24. True worshipers must worship God in spirit and truth.

Notice that Jesus does not say that they will worship God in spirit and sincerity. Our society likes to confuse sincerity and truth, but they can be two different things. Sincerity is subjective. We all sincerely believe things, but we can be sincerely mistaken about them.

Truth, on the other hand, is objective. Something is either true or it isn't. Even if nobody believes the truth, the truth is still true.

When it comes to the will of God, we know where to find truth. Jesus says in John 17 that the word is truth. Only worship that is authorized by the word is true worship.

Consider, for instance, a congregation that is welcoming and friendly, but they've got a rock band or a piano up on stage. According to ordinary English usage, bands play. Pianos are played. The movie titles are *And the Band Played On* and *The Piano Player*, not *And the Band Sang On* and *The Piano Singer*.

Bands play musical instruments. A piano is a musical instrument that is played. In both cases, the playing of a musical instrument is being offered as worship to God, and anybody who disputes that has got an agenda.

Let's test that against the Scriptures. If the true worship that Jesus contemplates involves musical instruments, we will be able to use the Scriptures to prove that Christians are supposed to worship using musical instruments. No such evidence exists, so the congregation with that band or piano isn't worshipping in truth.

At this point, our next decision isn't optional. Jesus doesn't say that those who worship God can worship in spirit and in truth if they want to. He says that they must worship in spirit and truth. If we want to be true worshipers, we can't be a part of a church that doesn't worship in truth.

Finally, if we are evaluating a church, we must LISTEN TO THEIR TEACHING. Once again, this is a sermon point about the word of Christ and the truth of Christ. Look at what He says about the importance of teaching in John 8:30-31. Abiding in the word is what makes us true disciples. When we abide in the word, we come to know the truth, and the truth will set us free.

The very mission of the church is to be the pillar and support of the truth. If a church does not teach the truth above all else, it has failed in its mission.

There are several ways this can happen. First, obviously, is if a church teaches false doctrine. If we visit a congregation, and we hear things that we know aren't in line with the Scriptures, obviously that's not a church to which we should join ourselves.

The second lesson here is subtler. In order to completely fulfill its mission, the preaching and teaching of a church must be more concerned with the truth than with anything else.

Sadly, in too many congregations, even ones that get the first two points here right, the teaching of the church does not emphasize the truth. The preacher's goal is no longer enlightenment. It has become entertainment.

I don't have anything against jokes, but if a sermon becomes a comedy routine, that's a problem. I don't have anything against emotional stories, but if a preacher does nothing but move from one tear-jerker to the next, that's a problem. I don't

have anything against wisdom from other sources than the Bible, but if a sermon is built around pop psychology instead of the word of truth, that's a problem.

Brethren, we don't need a church that will entertain us. We need a church that will feed us, and only the word can do that.

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