



## Is this *Church*?

Heidi Truitt, July 2023

**Read:** Ezekiel 8 – 9; Acts 2

Many things we have come to accept as doctrinal and necessary are merely based on tradition (**Col. 2:8**). Occasionally New Song receives push-back regarding the itinerant missionary work of worshiping with the saints in various group homes throughout the region. To some, this is not church – it simply doesn't check the boxes. What does the Bible say?

**Question:** True or false, to qualify as church, we need:

- **A building.** False. **Answer:** The first Christians were a persecuted church – they often worshiped in secret - in homes, caves, the woods. Occasionally they met at the temple court and/or in the centuries following Christ's ascension, at the stations of the cross.
- **Paid staff and/or paid staff with degrees in ministry.** False. **Answer:** The 12 apostles were volunteers; the next generations of disciples were also volunteers. All were serious students of the prophetic and apostolic writings– as we all should be (II Tim. 2:15).
- **A 501c3, a denominational affiliation.** False. **Answer:** There were no denominations, no 501c3, and no tax deductions in the first century. The Word of God was honored and spread rapidly throughout the region without it.
- **Awesome worship, memorable message, and programming.** False. **Answer:** The early church met in small groups, engaged in silent-singing (a persecuted church), with reverence, humility, and simplicity. The early church remembered the sacraments – they were in the Word and in prayer. They were not concerned about the pleasure and comfort of humans; rather, worship was focused on glorifying the Lord and the edification and equipping of the church.

The Bible tells us that the church is not a building; it is people – Christ-followers – the priesthood of believers (**1 Peter 2:9**). Since Christ’s ascension the Lord no longer lives in a temple made of hands, but in the hearts of those who seek to follow Him (**Acts 17:24**), therefore “church” is a gathering of saints – even as small as two or three who gather in His Name (**Mt. 18:20**). Some worship with one congregation; others like the Apostles John and Paul, are itinerant missionaries who spread the Gospel from church to church – worshipping with gatherings of saints throughout a region.

Sacred images are wonderful: Icons such as candles and crosses, vestments, and stained windows are helpful to remember the story, however the New Testament doesn’t list things that are necessary in worship other than the sincerity of heart to seek Him – even in humble settings (**Isaiah 55:6-7; Rom. 10:13**). Call on Him, and He will answer – seek Him, He will be found.

If the Lord were to return today, what would He think about our worship? Would He be pleased? Have we made worship about the attraction and pleasure of humans – or about Him? If we’re concerned with the attraction and approval of humanity – and the efforts required to keep them - we are not on course. The approval of man is idolatry (**Ezek. 8-9**). It’s a worship service – for the Lord’s glory and for the edification and equipping of the church. Can we bring back repentance? Can we read the Word together and teach about sin? Shall we be concerned with pleasing the Lord?

### **Prayer:**

Dear Lord, I’m concerned we’ve made it about something else. Like Ezekiel in chapters 8-9, I recognize and confess the sin of idolatry in your body, the church. We have failed to preach the Gospel, we have failed to offer the sacraments, we have not preached about sin nor offered the opportunity for repentance, we have not been in the Word, we have failed to humbly listen. We’ve used entertainment and programming to attract and manipulate. Please forgive us, Lord. Help us to be concerned with what pleases you. Have mercy, Father. Bring us back to your heart, your ways. Help me, Lord, to know how to walk humbly and rightly with you during these times. In Jesus’ Name, Amen