

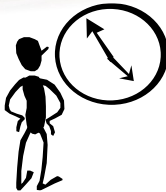
## THE BATTLE CREEK BULLETIN

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### Time of Assembly



#### Every other Sunday:

Bible Study 9:00 a.m.  
Worship 10:00 a.m.

#### OR

Bible Study 4:00 p.m.  
Worship 5:00 p.m.

#### Wednesday:

Bible Study 7:00 p. m.

## But if Not...

By Jefferson David Tant

In late May of 1940, during World War II, the German army had overrun the tiny European nation of Belgium. As Hitler's tanks and troops marched across Belgium, they pushed the defenders--British, French, and Belgian troops--toward the sea. Finally, the Allied forces of Great Britain, France, and Belgium were cornered at a seaport in northern France called Dunkirk. It looked as though all 338,000 of them would be wiped out by Hitler's approaching armies.

As the situation seemed more desperate, I have read that the British Navy was reluctant to send ships to evacuate the soldiers, as it seemed the Navy would be destroyed, and thus all would be lost.

The German Air Force was dropping leaflets showing a map of the area, indicating the soldiers were surrounded by the sea and the German Army, and they should lay down their arms and surrender.

Back in Britain, as the British people waited anxiously, a simple three-word message was transmitted from the doomed armies at Dunkirk: **"But if not."** Suddenly, the island nation of Great Britain sprang into action. Eight hundred boats of every size and description were called into action. Every battleship, gunboat, fishing boat, motorboat, yacht -- even rowboats! -- journeyed across the English Channel to help rescue those troops from Dunkirk and return them all safely to Britain — 338,000 soldiers!

What was it about that three-word message? How could three short words--only eight letters--start all that? How many today would recognize the source of those three words? The Miracle of Dunkirk happened because the British people recognized a phrase from the Bible. They recognized the phrase from the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who trusted in God, even when the king threatened to throw

them into a fiery furnace for refusing to worship an idol. And the British people knew that their troops were saying, "We will not give up, even if we die."

Their inspiration came from **Daniel 3:13-18**:

*"Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. Then they brought these men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar answered and said unto them, Is it of purpose, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, that ye serve not my god, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made, well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that god that shall deliver you out of my hands? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and he will deliver us out of thy hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."*

You may never be thrown into a fiery furnace, nor be backed into a corner by thousands of tanks and troops. But there will be times in your life when you will be challenged by our archenemy Satan when you will have to choose between doing the right thing and giving in to sin. You'll face hard times when doing the right thing will be hard or embarrassing. At such times remember that doing right is right even when it is hard and when it seems there is no immediate reward. God can deliver you and may reward you for doing right at that moment, **but if not**, it's still right to do right. Our reward **will** come in due time.

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## Christians Regardless

By Doy Moyer

Christians ought to see themselves as living out the story of Jesus. Since He suffered, we should be willing to suffer. As He gave Himself for others, we ought to be willing to give ourselves for others. As He submitted, so ought we to submit. As He loved, so should we love. As He forgave, so ought we to forgive. We follow His example, His way, His will. *"Not my will, but Yours be done."*

It doesn't matter who the governing authorities are. It doesn't matter if they are nice to us or not. It doesn't matter whether or not we agree with them or like what they do ([1 Peter 2:13-25](#)). If we are oppressed for Christ, then we are to rejoice that we are considered worthy to suffer shame for his name. In that case, we are to keep preaching and teaching Jesus ([Acts 5:41-42](#)). If it happened to Christ and His chosen disciples,

shall we think we will escape the derision of the world? Disciples are not above their Lord.

*“Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed” (II Timothy 3:12-14).*

Our calling is sure, and it is to follow the crucified Christ. We are not to deviate from His plan. We are not to see ourselves in roles to which He did not call us. There is no call from Jesus to violence or insurrection. The good fight of faith is just that. It is of faith. That fight can be justified only by the authority and grace of the One in whom we believe. We must set aside our desires, our love of this world, and put on the armor of God. Our sword is the Spirit’s sword, the word of God, and we are never to underestimate that power because it is directly tied to God Himself (Ephesians 6:10-18; Hebrews 4:12-13; Isaiah 55). If we are to be subversive, it is in the relentless teaching of His Word and the living out of His story in this world.

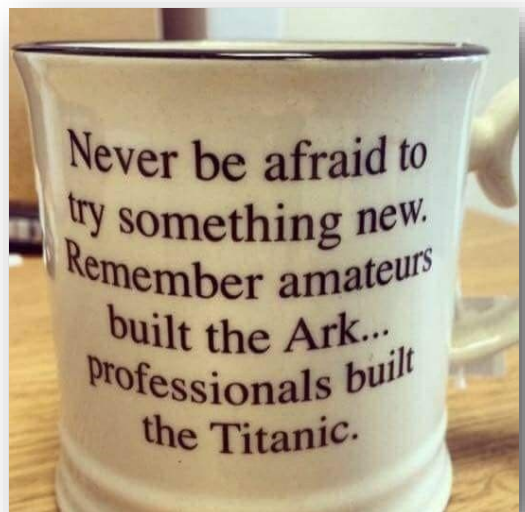
*“My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world” (John 18:36).*

*“Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:60).*

Trust God. He will handle the avenging of His people.

*“Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities” (Revelation 18:4-5).*

In the meantime, teach Jesus. The chips will fall where they may, and we will either be found for Him or against Him. The world will think us weak. Even many who believe will think that what we are saying here is “weak.” Yet there is a pervasive theme throughout Scripture that we ought to know well: strength is made perfect through weakness. God takes what appears to be weak and makes it strong. It is not strength as the world sees it. It is not strength by political means. It is the strength He alone provides to live out the path of His kingdom, to live His will on earth as it is in heaven. It is the way of the cross, and the resurrection is coming. This is the Gospel.



## Identifying a New Testament Church

By Steve Dewhirst

Traditionally, we gospel preachers have spoken of "identifying **the** New Testament church" in an effort to distinguish it from the sects roundabout. But in so doing, we have sometimes obscured the true nature of the body of Christ. We begin to preach about the church Jesus said He would build ([Matthew 16: 18](#)) in a broad, universal sense, then transition immediately into the organization and work of a local assembly, without explaining the difference between the two. Some have even taught that "the organization of Christ's church is congregational," or, "Christ gave His church a congregational form of government," as though the body of Christ is a body of congregations - in the manner of the sectarian world. With this mode of teaching, not only is it difficult for our brethren to comprehend non-sectarian Christianity, but it's confusing to the world as well.

To be specific, the "government" of the body of Christ is an absolute monarchy, with Christ as King ([Acts 2:29-36](#); [Ephesians 1:22-23](#); [Colossians 1:18](#)). It is a body of people saved by the blood of Christ: all the saved, of all the earth, of all ages ([Hebrews 12:22-24](#)). It is a spiritual body that defies physical identification. As Jesus said in [Luke 17:20-21](#), *"The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you."* Men and women seeking "primitive Christianity" do not join the church of Jesus Christ; it is not an institution to be joined. But men and women are added to it when they are baptized into Christ as an expression of faith in God ([Acts 2:41](#); [Colossians 2:12](#)). In a general sense, we acknowledge that "the saved" are part of the body of Christ, but it's a dangerous presumption to state that all local churches compose the body of Christ. First, Christ is the one who, alone, determines "who's in" and "who's out." And secondly, such a statement assumes that every single member in every local church is in a right relationship with God. Only in an accommodative sense can we point to a local church and refer to it as the body of Christ. In fact, it would be best to avoid such references altogether.

At the same time, however, local churches are readily identified in scripture, and easily identifiable today. And so we speak of "identifying **a** New Testament church." God's plan for individual Christians (having been saved from sin and added to the body of Christ) is to join themselves to one another in local assemblies for worship and work under the oversight of elders. The search for a New Testament church is not the focus of the conversion process, but the result. The focus is reconciliation to God through Christ. How, then, are New Testament churches identified? What are their distinguishing marks? First, they will be comprised of individuals who have been baptized into Christ and who, presumably, share a common fellowship with Deity ([Romans 6:3-4](#); [I John](#)

[1:3](#)). We humans must determine who will or will not be admitted to a local church, and while we are careful to assess one's relationship with God, our judgment is finite and imperfect.

A New Testament church will also be comprised of Christians who share a passion and commitment to the Lord's work. While this may be a feature lacking in some "churches of Christ," it should be a most prominent attribute. Christians must have a strong sense of personal responsibility. Local assemblies are built up "*by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part*" ([Ephesians 4:16](#)). And first on the list of personal responsibilities should be the teaching of Jost sinners. If a local church appears not to have that work as a priority, it's not a church with which one should identify.

A New Testament church will be made up of people sharing profound respect for the authority of Christ and His word ([Matt. 28:18-20](#)). It will be committed to following "the standard of sound words" (2 Tim. I: 13). Such an attitude will be reflected in worshiping and working according to the biblical pattern, as well as resisting the spirit of the age with all its innovations.

But of equal importance, a New Testament church will be characterized by its striving for spiritual growth. It will not be satisfied with "scriptural correctness" in work and worship while neglecting scriptural exhortations to edification ([I Corinthians 14:26](#)). It will not be satisfied with form over faith, but "*speaking the truth in love*" will "*grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ*" ([Ephesians 4:15](#)). A local church unconcerned with increasing spiritual understanding isn't fit for a disciple of Christ.

And although some people seem to think it shallow, a New Testament church will be made up of brothers and sisters who love each other. Not an emotional, sappy, touchy-feely "love" that tolerates sin to spare feelings, but that noble agape love that seeks what is in a brother's best spiritual interest.

It's a love that gives of oneself for the benefit of others. All the "scriptural correctness" in the world is but a "noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" without the love Christ enjoins upon His people ([I Corinthians 13:1](#); [I John 3:14-18](#)).

Our interest in evangelizing the world should lie, first, in reconciling people to God through faithful obedience to the gospel ([Romans 1:5](#)). Secondly, we must continue to study with babes in Christ, helping them to grow spiritually and making appropriate applications in their lives. And we must place a priority on teaching them how to identify faithful New Testament churches where they can be nurtured spiritually. But if we make "identifying **the** New Testament church" the focus of evangelism, we may be perpetuating the notion that conversion is merely a search for the right denomination.