

What is a “Distinctive?”

Ezekiel 44:23

And they shall teach my people the difference between the holy and profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean.

Philippians 2:15

That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world;

2Timothy 2:2

And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.

Titus 2:11&12

11 For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,

12 Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;

1Peter 2:9

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:

Distinctive (di-sting-k-tiv) Serving to distinguish; characteristic; distinguishing; having a special quality; style or attractiveness; notable

This is how Webster’s defines the word, “distinctive” and it’s a pretty good definition. But this word has almost been lost in regular usage- especially in the modern Church. In today’s culture, it is very popular to apply phrases such as “*just flow with the tide*”; “*go along to get along*”; “*blend in*”; “*don’t rock the boat*”; and other clever sayings that virtually mean that Christians and the Church have no need to be notable or “different” or “distinct” from the lost world”.

But contrary to that popular thinking- those who are redeemed by Christ are *commanded* in Scripture to be different from the world. Scripture clearly teaches that as believers- we are not to live our lives or even think in accordance with the ways of the lost, unsaved world- but we are to think and live Biblically- in accordance with and submission to Scripture- for the Glory of God!

2 Corinthians 6:14-18

14 Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?

15 And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?

16 And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,

18 And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

Our Lord Jesus said that the Church is not supposed to “blend in” or look like the world- but it is to stand out- be different- or be *distinctive* from the world.

Matthew 5:13-16

13 Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

14 Ye are the light of the world . A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

15 Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

So from this we can see that what makes genuine believers distinctive or what makes us be able to shine as lights in the dark world are three things:

1. What We Believe
2. What We Teach
3. How We Live our Lives

Different and Holy (Set Apart)

We must understand that these Scriptures do **not** teach that we are to live unto ourselves; nor are we to misuse these verses and assume that since we are saved- we are “better” than other people. Neither should anyone misuse these passages to justify being apathetic to those who are lost in the world.

No, God Sovereignly saved us by His Grace and Mercy- not because of any good thing in us. We didn’t earn it, nor do we deserve to be saved and so we are not to use these verses as a tool to become self righteous or self centered people. The Bible teaches that we are to “**preach the Gospel to every creature**” (Mark 16:15) and God’s Word warns us not to become a “**law unto ourselves**” (Romans 2:13).

These Distinctives are not an effort to manufacture our own “brand” of holiness or to promote legalism- but only a sincere desire to “**earnestly contend for the Faith that was once and for all delivered to the saints**” (Jude 3) so that we may be found faithful when Jesus returns.

The Bible clearly teaches that believers are to be *different* from the lost world and we are not to accept or ascribe to the teachings of the lost world- but we

are to humbly, graciously, and joyfully submit ourselves to the Authority of the Word of God as it pertains to matters of faith and godliness.

Romans 12:2

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

1John 2:15-17

15 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

Are We to Be Like the World in Order to Win the World?

In one of the most misguided efforts in Church history- the modern Church has sought to become more like the lost world in order to evangelize it. This faulty logic teaches that as the Church looks and acts more and more like the unsaved world- then lost people will find the Church to be more appealing and they will find Christianity less offensive and they will be more inclined to attend.

Therefore- the false reasoning goes- compromise with Divine Truth is the order of the day since it is the uncompromising Truth of Scripture that is the source of all the offence.

The net result of this effort is that many worldly and unbiblical activities and ideas have flooded into the Church to the point where today there is little difference between the pagan world and the House of God. And this new tactic at evangelism is not only *historically* wrong- but it is in violation of what the Scriptures do teach.

1 Peter 2:6-10

6 Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.

7 Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner,

8 And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.

9 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:

10 Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

To many in the modern Church- being ashamed of the Gospel and teaching things that are in contradiction to the Scriptures are seen as not only *beneficial* to Church growth- but these activities are actually *promoted* as being *directed* by God's Spirit. What would the Apostle Paul say about this new tactic of soul winning?

2 Timothy 4:1-5

1 I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;

2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;

4 And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

5 But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.

While compromising Divine Truth for the sake of Church growth may very well be an honest and sincere effort by many today- it is nonetheless a wrong and unbiblical one. The Bible is clear that the Church belongs to Jesus Christ and that it exists on the earth for only four reasons:

1. To glorify God
2. To edify the believers
3. To be the Pillar and Ground of the Truth
4. To manifest God's goodness in the earth

As God's people joyfully and humbly submit themselves to the Authority of Scripture in how they view life and in how easily, readily, and faithfully they obey God's Word- a public testimony of God's Goodness and Grace is displayed in the earth for all to see. This is genuine worship and it brings Honor and Glory to God through Jesus Christ:

Matthew 5:16

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

So in order to accomplish these four reasons- the Church must contain five components or else it cannot be a true "Church" (ekklesia) in the Biblical sense of the word¹:

¹ **Matthew 16:18**, ekklesia, Greek, an assembly of "called out" or "chosen" (elected) people, who leave their own homes and who assemble in a public place for the purpose of worshipping God and edifying one another to the end that God will be glorified and our joy will be full. (*Strong's Concordance* #1577) See also *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 1984) page 246

1. Preaching and teaching the Word of God rightly, faithfully, and fully
2. Fervent and Effectual Prayer
3. The two Scriptural Sacraments (Baptism and the Lord's Supper)
4. Godly Fellowship
5. Church Discipline (**Matthew 18**)

The great Reformer, John Calvin, said this is what a Church is really all about:

“Unless it is faithfully expositing the Scriptures; unless it is proclaiming clear, concise Theology; unless it is administering the Sacraments; and unless it is confronting and disciplining sin- it may be a lot of things- but it is not a Church”²

When the “chosen ones” (the elect) leave their own personal homes and assemble together in a public place for the purpose of worshipping God; being instructed by God's Word; and edifying one another in love- they are taught how to live and conduct their lives in accordance with Divinely inspired Truth so that they may know how to please the Lord. This Divine Truth is contained only in the sixty six Book of the Holy Bible and so it becomes paramount that if we are to live in accordance with this Truth- that we be able to understand and comprehend this Truth and that we learn how to properly and accurately and “rightly” interpret this Truth. (**2Timothy 2:15**).

Therefore, it is incumbent on all godly ministry to preach and teach so that three goals are met:

1. What do the Scriptures actually *say*?
2. What do the Scriptures *mean* by what they say?
3. How do people practically apply the correct meaning of Scripture to their own lives?

It is the responsibility of the Christian Church therefore to carefully and clearly articulate what is holy and what is profane; what is righteous and what is unrighteous; what is applicable and what is no longer applicable to the Christian believer in perfect harmony with the Divine Revelation of Scripture so that the believer may follow Christ well and worship Him in both Spirit and Truth.

Joel 2:1

Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand;

1Corinthians 14:8

For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?

This task of “trumpeting a clear sound” is best accomplished in the Christian

² John Calvin; *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Westminster John Knox Press, London 1960) page 527

Church by the Reformed concept of “Sola Scriptura” (Latin, “from the Scriptures alone”), which serves as a “check point” to assure that what the Church believes and what the Church teaches (i.e. all Doctrine; all holy Correction; all godly Reproof; and all instruction in Righteousness) is from the Scriptures and from the Scriptures **alone**- with the understanding that all human reasoning; human logic; social situations; History; Church Councils or Tradition is subject to error.(**2Timothy 3:16&17**). The Covenant of Peace Church accepts the concept of Sola Scriptura as the single best method of determining what we believe and what we teach.

Since the whole of Scripture contains the unsearchable volume of all that we need for both life and godliness (**2Peter 1:3**) and is the authoritative Rule of Christian Faith and Practice (**2Corinthians 10:13-15; Galatians 6:16; Philippians 3:16**)- the Board of Elders finds it necessary to periodically put forth smaller articles that deal with a particular subject so that the faithful believer may carefully examine, consider, and then apply this part of Divine Truth to their lives. These single articles are called “Distinctives” in that they assist the believer in living in accordance with the Word of God and not like the lost, unsaved world.

These “Distinctives” are a smaller “snap shot” of the much larger Confession of Faith of this Church; which in turn, is a summary of the whole of Scripture itself. We acknowledge that even as we earnestly try to assure that these Distinctives are entirely Biblical- that we as human beings can and do err. So we encourage each believer to put these “Distinctives” to the Berean test and:

The Acts 17:11

... searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

Because even the best of godly leaders can and do err- we reserve the right to amend these Distinctives as the Truth of Scripture becomes more plain to us. May God bless these Distinctives to your edification and sanctification.

I love you all. The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.

On behalf of the Board of Elders of
The Covenant of Peace Church,

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