

THE SIGNS OF A TRUE CHURCH

Part 13 of Foundations 260 - OT. Deuteronomy 4:1-14.

Peter Foxwell. Cornerstone Church. May 17, 2026.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF A TRUE CHURCH?

What makes a church a church - a community of God's people?

- How do we know if a group is just posing as a church?

DEUTERONOMY 4

Chapter 4 is like the Preamble to the Constitution.

- It lays a foundation on which Israeli culture was built.
- It also points to two signs of a true church.

Read Deuteronomy 4:1-14.

SIGN #1: A TRUE CHURCH LOVES GOD'S WORD

God spoke and called Israel to himself.

- He bound himself to them with covenant words.
- Moses recorded God's words spoken on Mount Sinai in statutes, ordinances, and commandments that he taught the nation.
- In Deuteronomy 4, Moses insisted that the people pay close attention to the word (listen), follow it carefully, keep it, remember it, and teach it to the next generation. They were not to add anything or take anything away from it.
- The word contained the wisdom that would make them a model for the nations. And it shaped a legal and religious system that reflected God's righteousness.

The New Covenant parallel to Deuteronomy 4 is the Great Commission.

- After his resurrection, Jesus gathered his people on the mountain:

Matthew 28:18-20 (CSB) “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth (he is God). 19 Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

- The true church teaches people to “observe” Christ’s words/commands.

We love God’s word, and it is the foundation of our life together.

Colossians 3:16 (CSB) Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you,

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (CSB) All Scripture is inspired by God (it is God’s word) and is profitable for teaching (what is right), for rebuking (what is not right), for correcting (how to get right), for training in righteousness (how to stay right), 17 so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

SIGN #2: A TRUE CHURCH LOVES GOD’S PRESENCE

God called Israel into existence by his word and presence.

- He was present with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and the nation.
- He summoned them to his presence at Mount Sinai:

Deuteronomy 4:12 (CSB) Then the LORD spoke to you from the fire. You kept hearing the sound of the words...

Deuteronomy 4:7 (CSB) For what great nation is there that has a god near to it as the LORD our God is to us whenever we call to him?

In the New Covenant era, God’s presence was manifested in Jesus Christ.

- He was God with us, God made visible to us (for example, John 1:1-14).

- The church is the temple in which Christ “lives” until the end of the age.

1 Corinthians 3:16 (CSB) Don't you yourselves know that you are God's temple and that the Spirit of God lives in you? (Also Ephesians 2:19-22).

A selection of signs that God is present in a church community:

- There is spiritual life rather than dead religion.
- Jesus Christ is loved and honored as God.
- Gatherings are filled with joyful, engaged worship.
- Lives are changing.
- The members are gladly pursuing godliness - the fruit of the Spirit.
- The word of God is treasured, taught, and followed.
- Prayer is woven into every aspect of the community.
- People step up to serve because they expect the Spirit's power.

HOLY COMMUNION UNITES WORD AND PRESENCE

God's word is made visible, and his presence is manifested.

1 Corinthians 10:16 (CSB) The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing (koinonia - participation) in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?

- Scholar Gavin Ortlund said, “This is more than a mere remembrance of Christ; Christ is active, giving himself to us in an intimate way in this Sacrament.”¹
- Charles Spurgeon said it is "the nearest communion with Christ that we have ever known.”
- So, maybe we should add a third checkbox to the list: A true church loves feasting on the spiritual food of the most sacred body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JbPxxgZ_AfOI

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

Review

- Review Peter's May 17th teaching and study guide.
- What were the main insights of Peter's teaching?
- What questions do you have about the passage or Peter's teaching?
- What were the main applications or takeaways for your life?

Discuss

1. The sermon said a true church loves God's word. What does that look like beyond just hearing a sermon each week?
2. The sermon said that God's presence creates God's people. How is that different from just a group of people who share beliefs or values?
3. The sermon mentions "spiritual life rather than dead religion." How would you recognize the difference in real life? Can a church emphasize God's presence but drift from God's word or vice versa? What dangers does that create?
4. What is the difference between viewing Holy Communion as a memorial instead of experiencing it as true spiritual participation in Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16)? How might your approach to and experience of Communion change if you truly believed Christ meets you there?

Prayer Focus

- Our 247 prayer: "Lord, please add daily to the Cornerstone those who are being saved."
- Pray that the Cornerstone continues to love God's word and presence.