



New Testament Expositor

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Recognizing Relationship Red Flags

A new relationship is exhilarating. The brain releases bonding agents like oxytocin, adrenaline, and dopamine—hormones that create a sense of connection and excitement. Chemical nerve cells, like serotonin, begin firing which increases our mood and enthusiasm and creates a sense of euphoria (Psalms 139:14). Fireworks are literally being set off in our brains, and physiologically we feel something special.

Someone wants to be with you. You are attracted to them. You feel wonderful. In this euphoric state of “falling in love,” you are also vulnerable. These feelings can overshadow other thought processes, blur your decision making, and inhibit your abilities to recognize relationship red flags (Proverbs 4:26). If noticed, red flags will signal warnings of potential hazards and can help you recognize a pitfall before it is too late. If overlooked, disregarded, or explained away, you may be running head on into a disaster.

Christian dating is a time to figure out if someone is *the one* with whom you want to spend the rest of your life. It is not enough that they profess Christianity; you must also ensure that as a couple you are compatible. It is true that if two people love God above all else, they can make any relationship work. Absolutely! But how can you tell if this is really the case—that the other person truly loves God above all else? You must conscientiously look for and recognize red flags. A healthy relationship will encourage inspection and reflection while unhealthy relationships reject any criticism and scrutiny (Philippians 4:8; Colossians 3:2).

There are common red flags in unhealthy relationships and if they are considered honestly and maturely a great deal of hurt and heartache may be avoided.

If you feel afraid to ask questions, that’s a red flag that the relationship may struggle with open and honest communication. Whether you fear what the response might be or what reaction you will receive to questions asked, being afraid to ask a question should cause you concern. In a healthy relationship, open communication prevails and questions that seek to validate information or clarify statements are always welcome (Proverbs 6:16-19; Revelation 21:8).

If you are constantly worried about what you have said, that’s also a red flag. You don’t want fear and worry to consume your life because you are always concerned that your significant other may disapprove, belittle, condescend, or disregard you (Titus 1:15-16; Matthew 5:37-39).

If you notice volatile and unpredictable moods and behaviors, that’s likely a red flag that they are not being genuine. When people feel the need to mask their true character it often leads to frustration and outbursts of anger that are inconsistent with their former projection of self (Proverbs 22:24-25).

Proverbs 22:24-25

Make no friendship with a man that is given to anger; And with a wrathful man thou shalt not go: Lest thou learn his ways, And get a snare to thy soul.

If you observe them treating others poorly, that’s a big red flag. An honest assessment of how they treat and interact with other people is an indicator of true character. Self-esteem issues and sinful attitudes of pride, arrogance, and superiority may come to light through careful observation (Proverbs 16:18).

If you feel that your boundaries are being breached, that’s a red flag that you are being disrespected. Boundaries are essential in life, and they are respected in a healthy relationship. Often in unhealthy relationships one individual will encourage or force another individual to violate their personal boundaries. Incidentally, if this red flag goes unnoticed there has likely been a weakening of your standards (I Corinthians 15:33).

If you begin to feel guilty for spending time with other people, that’s a red flag that your relationship may be sabotaged by envy and jealousy (James 3:16). It may feel like you are being controlled and limited to who your friends may be or who you can spend time with based on someone else’s approval. This red flag will likely develop into veiled threats of abandonment and create a fear of rejection.

Recognizing and honestly considering relationship red flags does not mean you are being judgmental, self-righteous, or unkind. It means you are being smart and godly (Proverbs 13:20). It is not our responsibility to marry someone so we can help “fix” them or because we don’t want to hurt them. The scriptures warn about being unequally yoked (I Corinthians 6:14). The reality is that your marriage will have a tremendous impact on your eternal destination and the journey through this life to get there. Choose wisely.

Peter Ray Cole, LPC (Pumpkin Center Church of Christ)

The Visible / Invisible Church in Denominational Teachings

The following four paragraphs come from a blog article that speaks to a current teaching of denominations about what they call the visible and invisible church. Following these four paragraphs will be a biblical reply to this error.

“The visible church ‘consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, and of their children.’ The visible church is known by vital and observable activities such as membership commitments, corporate worship centered around the word and sacraments, loving fellowship, and service. This church is in view when researchers estimate that Christianity has more than two billion adherents today

“The invisible church ‘is a holy congregation and gathering of true Christian believers, awaiting their entire salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed by his blood, sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit.’ No research team—no one but God—can count the members of this church, those who are united by faith to Jesus Christ.

“Louis Berkhof summarizes the distinction like this: ‘The church as the spiritual body of Jesus...is essentially invisible at present, though it has a relative and imperfect embodiment in the visible Church and is destined to have a perfect visible embodiment at the end of the ages.’

1 John 2:19

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they all are not of us.

“The visible/invisible distinction guards against several errors. First, it prevents us from equating salvation with church membership. Not all those in the institutional church are of the true body of Christ, being savingly united to Jesus by true faith (1 John 2:19; cf. Rom. 9:6). Second, it warns against counting only born-again people as church members. Young children of believers, as beneficiaries of covenant promises, should be counted as church members and expected, in time, to publicly profess their faith in Christ and personally unite with the visible church. Third, it should keep us from supposing that the visible church is irrelevant and that only membership in the invisible church matters. In the Bible, adherence to the Christian faith is linked to meaningful membership in a local church. If you are united to Christ the head, you will be part of his body (Eph. 5:23, 32).”

<https://corechristianity.com/resources/articles/is-the-church-relevant-belgic-confession-article-27->

Does the New Testament speak of a visible and invisible church? It does not. If it does not, then why do so many people talk about such an entity existing? They do so because they see so many people of significant spiritual devotion belonging to a variety of churches that surely, it is believed, the Lord will not condemn those so devoted. If that’s so, they must be in the Lord’s *invisible* church

(saved), not just man’s *visible* church (saved and unsaved).

Without giving any attention whether the Lord will condemn or not, let us consider whether the visible/invisible church is a New Testament teaching. Since I declare that it is not, how do I know this and can I make the case? Yes, I can make the case. Begin by looking up the words *visible* and *invisible* and see their locations in the Bible. Choose any Bible version you like; I choose to use the American Standard Version (ASV). The word *invisible* is used 5 times, all in the New Testament (Romans 1:20; Colossians 1:15, 16; 1 Timothy 1:17; Hebrews 11:27). Not once is it used to speak of God’s invisible church; thus, there is no New Testament teaching about God’s *invisible* church. What about the word *visible*? This word is used once in the Bible (Colossians 1:16) and it speaks (in the context) nothing about a visible church in contradistinction to an *invisible* church.

Colossians 1:16

[F]or in him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created through him, and unto him;

Is the church visible in a community? If there is signage on a building being used by a church, then there certainly is. Only if members of a church are quietly meeting and there is no building being used by them, then perhaps there is an invisible quality to it, but this clearly is not what they have in mind when using the word *invisible*.

“Are you not trying to strain a gnat, Ron?” No, I just want to determine whether the assertion of visible/invisible churches existing is a teaching of the New Testament. If it is not, then this needs to be made known.

A second piece of evidence that I present is in the variety of churches that exist. It is this variety that has generated such a declared teaching. Think about it for a moment. There are untold numbers of denominations in a community. Within them are devout people who are genuinely interested in serving the Lord. Are all of these churches right in their varied teachings? No, this is not possible. For instance, one church teaches a person does not have to be baptized to be saved, while another church does. They both can’t be right. One says it is acceptable to pray to Mary, while another church says it is not. They both can’t be right.

These varied doctrines are important to these churches, and because there are many devoted people within the doors of those buildings that teach such varied doctrines (some teachings are not even in the New Testament), people find a way to accept them as part of God’s *invisible* church because of their genuine faith. If another church rejects such teachings, regarding it as unscriptural and deadly, those genuinely devoted believers are, also, part of God’s *invisible* church. Because there is no heart to condemn genuinely devoted people, the invisible church concept/idea had been invented. God placed them in there (so to speak).

Here is how this is justified: there are essential doctrines

in the New Testament that must be believed (these vary with each church, for they all think what they believe is essential). If there are people who are spiritually devout, then they are part of the saved. Those that come because of a sense of duty, fellowship, with faith that is weak – these are people part of the *visible* church and are not saved.

Determining what is essential is crucial; if the Scripture teaches it, it is essential. Following this approach, one can't go wrong. For instance, consider salvation as taught in Acts 2. Peter preached the Lord's message; the hearers asked him and the other apostles what they needed to do to eliminate their guilt in killing the Messiah, the Lord's Chosen. Peter told them to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit will be theirs (Acts 2:38). This is an essential doctrine of the New Testament; this is expressly taught. To say / teach something different than this is to teach something not in the New Testament. This is essential.

Many people say they are Christians, but when you ask what they did to become a Christian, they will say something like the following: "I prayed a prayer and asked Jesus into my heart" or "I was baptized as an infant and then later I went through Confirmation classes to give me a better understanding." People who give these answers on what they did to become a Christian may be strongly devoted to the Lord and exemplify a Christian disposition better than most, but what they did is *not* taught in Scripture! It is plain, and it is simple.

Visible, Invisible

Those who submit to the Lord in obedience are added to His church (Acts 2:41, 47; 5:14; 11:24), and His church is visible in every community. If it is the Lord's church, it is visible. What about man-made denominations? Denominations, by their very nature, are the products of man. A product of man may seek to please the Lord, but those who produce this product (if you will) presume on the Lord's prerogative/authority to exist. They came into existence well after the time of the establishment of the Lord's church, starting with the Roman Catholic Church. When you drive through a community, have you ever wondered why there are so many churches with so many names? It is the by-product of men who think they have authority to bring a church into existence, saying to themselves there is nothing in a name. This is manifestly wrong, for in Acts 4:12, there is a great deal in a name, the Lord's name.

Acts 4:12

And in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved.

"Are you saying, Ron, that all the people in the building where you attend are saved people?" I am not saying that. What I am saying is that all who have obeyed the Lord Jesus are Christians and they make up the church. Those who are in the building are nothing more than people in a building, be they Christians or not. This is very important: there are no saved people outside the church and a "church building" does not constitute the Lord's church; it is simply

a physical structure built (or purchased) for the convenience of saints gathering.

According to the 4th paragraph that begins this article, there are some things to which the visible /invisible church contributes: "The visible/invisible distinction guards against several errors. First, it prevents us from equating salvation with church membership. Not all those in the institutional church are of the true body of Christ, being savingly united to Jesus by true faith (1 John 2:19; cf. Rom. 9:6)."

This, however, is not so. Notice the biblical passages from Ephesians 1 and 5. "...and he put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all (1:22-23). "...For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, *being* himself the saviour of the body...Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it" (5:23, 25).

"Second, it warns against counting only born-again people as church members. Young children of believers, as beneficiaries of covenant promises, should be counted as church members and expected, in time, to publicly profess their faith in Christ and personally unite with the visible church."

This is *not* a teaching of the New Testament. It is, strictly, a man-made teaching. In the New Testament, salvation is always related to men and women, never children. Only the born-again are saved, those who hear, believe, repent and are baptized.

"Third, it should keep us from supposing that the visible church is irrelevant and that only membership in the invisible church matters. In the Bible, adherence to the Christian faith is linked to meaningful membership in a local church. If you are united to Christ the head, you will be part of his body (Eph. 5:23, 32)."

In the Bible (New Testament), the local church is the Lord's church; there are no denominations. Why be a member of a church that is not His? Jesus is the head of His body, the church and He died to save the church. The saints are those sanctified, set apart for God, the saved in Christ. If one is saved, he/she is in God's church. "Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28).

The New Testament does not recognize, much less teach that unsaved people are in the church.

Conclusion

There is no New Testament teaching that speaks of a visible church in contradistinction to an invisible church. If there is no New Testament teaching, then let us not grant to others this is an acceptable idea. They be well-meaning in their sentiments, but well-meaning or not, it is not a biblical doctrine.

Ron Thomas (Minister– Rio Grande Church of Christ)

New Congregation

Scioto Valley Church of Christ, Chillicothe, Ohio, had its inaugural assembly in mid-October 2024. Until holding its first formal worship service in a rented church building on January 2, 2025, the congregation met in various homes and other locations. On Sunday, March 2 a “charter assembly” was held with 50 individuals placing their official membership and committing to the work. On June 1, 2025, the congregation conducted its first worship assembly at its new location, 651 Ervin Avenue, and has contracted to purchase the building that formerly housed a small denominational congregation. Currently the average attendance is in the mid-seventies, having had ninety-nine attendees as its highest attendance, and is being blessed with growth. Scioto Valley Church of Christ is dedicated to advancing the kingdom of Christ by reaching out to the community with the New Testament gospel message of Jesus Christ. The congregation opens its doors and is excited to welcome those who wish to be part of God’s New Testament family in Chillicothe. The work of this congregation can be followed on Facebook and can be contacted by phone at 740-466-4692. The prayers of the brotherhood for the growth and effectiveness of this congregation are coveted.

Morality Required After Baptism (Romans 6:12—Galatians 5:16).

The Christian, following baptism rises to a newness of life. This is a life that is not mindful of the old man or how the old man once lived his life. The life of the old man is one that was full of sin and lived a life to the selfish desires of the heart. A moral compass directs the life of the believer that has been led into the watery grave of baptism. Man is to put off sin following commitment to God. The temptation is not less for the one that has put on Christ but in many cases the temptation is worse. Yet, the Christian must overcome these fleshly desires which are the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life (1 John 2:15-16). The Apostle Paul tells the Romans that they are not to let sin reign in their bodies. He tells the ones in Galatia to walk in the spirit and to not fulfill the lust of the flesh. Once baptized into Christ, the focus on moral living in the sight of God should be the desire of every believer. Paul tells the Romans not to be conformed to the world but to be changed or transformed by the renewing of their mind (Romans 12:1-2). The Christian can no longer live a life that is full of sin while considering oneself being a child of God.

Following baptism, Christians walk in a different way. This walking is not in reference to a stride but rather to a manner of life. The Christian’s walk considers how the Christian lives life and responds to all moments in life with the mindset of Christ. It is not in reference to a particular part or piece of life but rather the implication of the Christian walk is in everything we do. No matter where the Christian goes, Christ needs to be the focus of living. Paul does not leave Galatians without direction. He directs them to, “Walk by the Spirit”. We have the Spirit in the revealed word of God, and His word can guide our every step (Psalm 119:105). Man lives by the ability to do right or to do wrong. This is innate in man. One connects to righteous living that is purposed by God and the other connects to a life of sin in which separation from God exists. The Christian must not continue in immorality after being declared a child of God through faith and the waters of baptism. He must allow God and His word to direct his every step as he lives the life of changed person.

Scott M. Judge (Minister—Elm Grove Church of Christ)

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AREA EVENTS UPCOMING

July 16-21, Polishing the Pulpit, 200 Sycamore St. Branson MO 65616

August 15-21, Polishing the Pulpit, 202 Gists Creek Rd. Sevierville TN 37876

July 18, Friday Night Sing. 7pm– 9pm Rio Grande Church of Christ 568 State Route 325, Rio Grande, OH 45674; P- 740-245-9130

August 1-3, Gospel Meeting, Various Speakers, Washington Street Church of Christ 601 Washington Street St. Albans WV 25177

August 3-6, North Central Ohio Lectures, Growing With Christ, Various Speakers, 5075 Toledo Rd. Lorain OH 44055

September 20, Crum Lectureship, Various Speakers, 278 Crum Rd. Crum WV, 25669

October 11, Praise Him Lectureship and Youth Rally, Elm Grove Church of Christ 8155 Chenoweth Fork Rd. Piketon OH 45661, 740-434-8721

October 19-23, Victory Lectureship, West Virginia School of Preaching, 4th St. and Willard Ave. Moundsville WV, 26041

September 20, 2025

6th Annual Brotherhood Wide
Door Knocking Day

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