

The Need to Find a Good Church

2 Peter 3:17 *Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.*

God has directly commanded to not fall into the custom of not congregating (**Hebrews 10:25**). To let other things take the time that should be dedicated to God is a sin, and does us great harm. Churchless we cannot spiritually cleanse ourselves nor get spiritual food to grow. We become weak and are easy prey to spiritual predators that are trying to drag the innocents after them as disciples.

Acts 20:29-30 *For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.*

The Bible gives us clear advice on the presence of evil people (Mat. 7:21-23) that erect for themselves religious empires pretending to be good churches. God helps us in remaining firm in the faith by God's structure and invention called the local church.² **Thessalonians 2:2-3** *That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. 3 Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first... 15 Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.*

How to evaluate a church?

Few churches present themselves to the world as "bad". All say that they are of God¹, and many say that they are the only ones who are still faithful to God. Even Jesus advised us in **Mat. 23:2-4** that the evil workers will many times say good things, but they themselves are **hypocrites** (bad mark) that do not do what they preach to others. We should study things and not accept just people's word and leave it at that. There are two principles

¹ 2 Cor 11:13-15 the false apostles and deceitful workers transform themselves into apostles of Christ, and Satan as an angel of Light.

that guide us in recognizing a good church: (1) their doctrine, and (2) their practice (constant actual conduct). We should understand that **belief (doctrine) produces action (practice)**. Many say many good things, but the majority fall horribly when one compares their doctrine with their practice. We should say that God has established these things to manifest by themselves in time (**2 Cor. 11:13-15** "*whose end shall be according to their works*" **Mat. 7:15-24** "*ye shall know them by their fruits*".)

In doctrine the church should have a literal view of the Bible, and believe what is encountered in the Scriptures. A good church exalts the Bible, and tries to put more importance on it, not less. Many bad churches try to explain away miracles and the difficult and unpopular parts (like prohibitions on women preachers or condemnation on homosexuality or free sex) in order to accommodate themselves to the world. A good church has no fear to stand the scorn of the world because God has commanded us to take a position or practice. Above all a good church should be an expert at explaining the plan of salvation, and this should be a constantly repeated theme. There should be changed lives, sin should be preached against and victory won in people's lives. Salvation should not be reduced to a simple prayer and you are saved, but a spiritual commitment and dedication with Christ should be emphasized that changes people's lives. We should question things when great numbers of people supposedly accept Christ, or great grandiose plans for God's work are put forth or claimed as being done, but the majority of these decisions do not follow through to participate and support that work of God, nor are they baptized and giving financially. Those that are saved should be integrated into the work of God in that church where they are saved. Evangelism should see its fruits back in the fields working in a short time.

Good Marks

1 Corinthians 16:15-16 *I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints.) 16 That ye submit yourselves unto such, and to every one that helpeth with us, and laboureth.*

The first mark of a good church is that they are **active in the work of God**, and with the ministry and serving of the saints. The work of God is defined as seeking the lost to present them the gospel wherever they are found, exhorting them to accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, then to disciple the converts bringing them into the local church where they are edified and built up and they themselves enter the ministry. Part of this work is spiritual edification² of the saints, and the economic help between brethren, and the giving of tithes for the work of the ministry and salary of the workers (**1 Cor 9:14; Gal. 6:6; Mat. 10:10; Luke 10:7; 1 Tim. 5:17**).

Activity is not necessarily the same as spirituality (Luke 10:38), because good activity is the fruit of having sat at the feet of God and worshipping God, and it is born in the heart from a person's love of Christ, and desire to participate in His work and do something for your Savior. Many churches emphasize activities almost as a requirement to be saved (bad mark).

We should also note that a good church has a **leader (pastor) who is a man of God** who cares spiritually for the church (**1 Tim 3:5**). His principal work is to spiritually shepherd the flock (church), to advise, protect, and visit the sheep to fix what is wrong (counseling). **Pastoring** speaks of preaching (to exposit or explain) the Word of God. To **advise and protect** speaks of identifying spiritual dangers to the flock and to be active in fighting against them, to put himself at personal in doing this. **Pastoral visitation** speaks of visiting individually the members to supply or correct whatever is wrong with them (counseling). There

² Edification is spiritual. By this we mean the presentation of explanations of passages from the Bible so as to change their lives and bring them into conformity with the will of God, leaving off sin.

should be an exhortation and effort shown towards the members to get them to attend, participate, tithe, pray, and be active in the work of God in this church. There should be official discipline from the church against church members that act unworthy of Christ, and are not worried about their poor example and life. The good church is marked by **a fervor and dedication for prayer**, and prayer is considered essential by them. Everything is planned in prayer, and prayer soaks every work and worker constantly. The good church places the Word of God as the centerpiece of all their services, primarily by **preaching and teaching the Scripture**. This should be by careful exposition, that is, the actual reading of verses from the Bible, then explanations of these, followed by application to our lives (Neh. 8:8).

Bad Marks

Presumption of doing great works for God.

Mat. 24:24-25 reveals these false workers by their boasting of doing "*great signs and wonders*." The true men of God are like Christ, humble and meek³, and we will never find them with pride, arrogance or self exaltation. Paul advised (**Acts 20:28-30**) the elders of the churches of the presence of evil workers that are "*grievous wolves*" that (1) will not forgive "*spare*" the flock of God, (2) that speak perverse⁴ things and (3) with the end in mind of dragging into submission and following of them the brethren. Peter also enters here in **2 Peter 2:1-3** says that these will introduce "*damnable heresies*" (things which divide and destroy the peace and brotherly love of the brethren). Peter marks them as **causing shame** towards the name and the cause of Christ because of what they do, and because their ways are laced with covetousness. Ezekiel 34 also describes evil pastors who are cruel people,

³ 2 Corinthians 10:1 the weapons of our warfare are meekness and gentleness of Christ, "not cruelty and force" Eze. 34:4; Jer. 23:1-4; Isa. 40:11.

⁴ "Perverse" is things that turn aside, twisting, distorting, that which is opposite the plans and purposes of God.

taking advantage of others, that frighten and scatter the sheep by their actions rather than gathering them. They are also marked by their greed (they are not satisfied with a just salary, but seek luxury⁵). Their mark is their astute use of "*feigned*" (plastic that conforms to any shape or need) words. Another mark is their strong hand in dominating⁶ (dictator) instead of being a godly example. The leaders of a good church are examples of Christ⁷, specially the pastor.

The Community of the Church

God did not make our salvation in a vacuum. When Jesus saved us, He made us a part of the redeemed, (Jesus is the head that commands and directs, and the members are the body that obeys). No member is alone, but there is a union and relationship that nurtures one another, and there is spiritual care for all. In a body, the members are those that maintain healthy and alive the rest. In our salvation, the basis of our incorporation is because of our love of Christ. **Mat. 25:31-46** explains that those who are really saved are those that serve Christ by serving the brethren. This is the mark of a saved person. **1 John 3:14** *We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.* There is no better mark of a godly community of truly saved than abundant love between them, serving one another in love, and doing the work of God. A good church is a blessing from God. Find one, and give thanks to God for it. Support it with everything you can.

Size, luxuries, ministries, comforts, and all such things should not be the deciding factor.

⁵ Eze 34:2-3; Isa. 56:11; 1 Tim. 3:3; Tito 1:7, 11; 1 Peter 5:2.

⁶ 1 Peter 5:2-3 speaks of "being lords over God's heritage" instead of "ensambles to the flock".

⁷ Heb. 13:7; 1 Tim 4:12; Tito 2:6-8; 1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; Phil. 3:17; y 1 Thes. 1:6.

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The marks of a Good Church

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Food, exercise, and health many times decide if one has a good life or problems. Equally a good church decides if we have a good spiritual life or no. Without a good church, spiritual problems will torture the Christian and leave him without the means to resolve his problems, leave him with a weakened spiritual life, and with sadness without end and without remedy. For the Christian that finds a good church, all of this is just the opposite. The church ministers to his needs, and causes spiritual welfare in his life. It is a pleasure to serve God there, and to grow and have a relationship with the family God supporting you there. Find a good church!