



WHICH CHURCH
SHOULD YOU JOIN?

EARL M. BLACKBURN

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BY EARL M. BLACKBURN

ONCE THE QUESTION of joining a church is settled, (see the pamphlet **WHY YOU SHOULD JOIN A CHURCH**), the next question is which or what type of church should you join? In looking for a church you should remember the old axiom “Not everyone who calls himself a Christian is a true Christian.” What is true of professed Christians is true also of churches; not every group that calls itself a church is a true church.

There are certain qualities you should look for in a church. The purpose of this pamphlet is to describe these qualities and thus help you find a true church of Jesus Christ of which you can become a member. The qualities are as follows:

1. **A BIBLICAL CHURCH IS ONE WHERE THE BIBLE IS THE ONLY GUIDE FOR FAITH AND PRACTICE.** A strong emphasis on preaching and teaching the whole counsel of God demonstrates this. An absence of this emphasis produces an anemic and weak church and you would not want to be a part of such a group. The preaching of the Holy Scriptures is the chief means whereby God blesses His people. Titus 1:1-3 says that God has “manifested His Word through preaching.” Look for and join a church in which the Bible is fully expounded, warmly taught, and practically applied by pastors and elders who are God-called men.

2. **YOU SHOULD LOOK FOR A CHURCH WHERE THE WORSHIP OF GOD IS REVERENT AND BIBLICAL.** There are many churches that seek to entertain people and are more man-centered than God-centered. They feature popular personalities and introduce fashionable elements into worship which the Bible does not allow. You do not go to church primarily to feel better or be entertained, but to worship the true and living God through the Lord Jesus Christ. The basic elements of true worship are: reading and exposition of the Scriptures, the Holy Bible; prayer, singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs; giving of tithes and offerings; baptism; and the Lord’s Supper. Find a church where these are carried out in holy and joyful reverence to God.

3. COUPLED WITH RIGHT WORSHIP IS THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF GOD. The God of the Bible is Spirit, eternal, unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, truth, and love, and is absolutely sovereign and gracious. He must ever be proclaimed and exalted. Any church that is man-centered and holds weak and feeble views of the triune God will not be much help to you. If there is to be any lasting progress made in the Christian life, a believer must be constantly presented with high and glorious views of God. The belief that God is powerless unless we allow Him to work is an unbiblical and dangerous view of the Lord that produces weak Christians. Remember, the prophet Moses said that God is “glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders;” (Exodus 15:11). A true church is God-centered and always seeking to exalt and please Him.

You might ask, “How can I comprehend this awe-inspiring God that is revealed in the Bible?” The apostle Paul says we see “the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). That is why a church must be Christ-centered. Therefore look for a church that has a majestic view of God and is continually lifting up the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ in all His fullness.

4. IN LOOKING FOR A CHURCH TO JOIN, YOU SHOULD SEEK ONE WHERE THERE IS LOVE FOR THE BRETHREN (see John 13:34,35, 15:9-12; 1 John 4:7ff.). The Lord Jesus said, “By this all will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). Where people are joined together by love of God’s truth there will be love for the brothers and sisters in Christ. Love for the brethren is shown toward each member of the church through actions, as well as words. There will be fellowship and an open and shared life with one another.

5. LOOK FOR A CHURCH WHICH HAS AN EVIDENT COMPASSION FOR THE UNSAVED. This will be seen on a local level in works of evangelism and mercy and on a global level in a burden for missions and church planting. The first petition of the Lord’s Prayer is for God’s name to be hallowed. A church is to strive to make God’s saving

name and truth known in all the earth so that He may be revered and worshiped by all. Any church that neglects this, especially as it is expressed in the last command of Jesus Christ to go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20), is not obedient to God and should not be joined.

6. CHURCH DISCIPLINE IS ANOTHER IMPORTANT CRITERIA IN LOOKING FOR A CHURCH TO JOIN. Most churches today do not care how their members live and behave either in public or private or with one another. Financial and sexual scandals, plus other personal atrocities, abound in many churches and very little, if anything, is done about them. However, a true church of Jesus Christ will pursue genuine holiness among its members and seek to correct and help those who stray. The church will endeavor to follow the guidelines laid down by the Chief Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ, regardless of how unpopular they are to the world and even to other Christians. Join only a church where discipline is practiced in accordance with the following passages: Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15; 2 Corinthians 2:5-9.

7. LASTLY, LOOK FOR A CHURCH WHERE YOU WILL BE ENCOURAGED AND STIRRED TO GROW IN GRACE, HOLINESS, LOVE, AND CHRIST-LIKENESS. A real mutual ministry will involve each member warning the unruly, comforting the fainthearted, and upholding the weak ones (see 1 Thessalonians 5:14). This will produce an environment that will strengthen you and cause you to grow as a Christian.

You may not find a church in your neighborhood that meet these qualities. Religious humanism and pragmatism have caused many churches that once stood for truth to abandon biblical principles and guidelines. You may have to travel a distance to find a biblical and suitable congregation of God's people. The travel will be more that worth the trouble as you see your life grow and mature.

In conclusion consider what Daniel Wray, a contemporary Christian leader has said,

One of the greatest needs of our times is for living, biblical churches. No other institution can adequately replace them.

Every Christian ought to give much thought and prayer to this subject, and then order his life in such a way as to further the work of God's true churches. This is not a time for an apathetic, easy-going attitude toward churches. The needs are great. The pressures of ungodliness are heavy. Those who demean God's churches are legion. Let us, then, rise up and go forth with boldness to declare ourselves servants of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, by following His will in His local church wherever His providence directs us.

There is no such thing as a perfect church. But, to the praise of God, there are good and reforming churches who have rediscovered the above mentioned truths. When you find a good church, become a member and enroll in it wholeheartedly. Support it in every way and labor to make it a useful instrument in the kingdom of God. Pray for its leaders, intermingle with its members, take part in its endeavors, and practice biblical churchmanship to the fullest extent of your God-given ability.