

Choosing a Church

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1. Look for a church where there is a strong emphasis on Bible teaching and the application of biblical teaching to daily life. The local church should follow the model of the apostles who taught *both* objective truth, and *also* how believers were to live from day to day. For example, compare Ephesians, chapters 1-3, with chapters 4-6. A pastor should be 'apt to teach' [1 *Tim* 3.2], and should labour in this work [1 *Tim* 5.7; 2 *Tim* 3.16-4.4]. Look for a church where the pastor does this. Avoid a church that has given this work over to women, contrary to the New Testament's clear teaching [1 *Tim* 2.12; 2 *Tim* 2.2]
2. Look for a church where worship is reverent and biblical. Beware of churches that entertain people more than they worship God, and which introduce elements into worship which are not taught in the Bible. The basic elements of true worship are: Prayer [Matt 6.9-13; Acts 2.42, 4.23-31]; reading and exposition of Scripture [1 *Tim* 4.13; 2 *Tim* 4.2; Eph 4.11, 12]; singing [Matt 26.30; Eph 5.18-20; Col 3.16]; offerings [1 *Cor* 16.1, 2; 2 *Cor* 8 and 9; Prov 3.9; Phil 4.18]; confessions of faith [1 *Cor* 15.3-5; Rom 10.9, 10]; the Lord's Supper [Matt 26.17; 1 *Cor* 11.23-29]; and Baptism [Matt 28.19; Acts 2.38]. Seek a church where these elements are given full attention, without being pushed to the side by other things.
3. Look for a church where 'the love of the brethren' is evident [*John* 13.34, 35, 15.9-12; *Eph* 4.29-5.2; 1 *John* 4.7-5.2]. This, of course, is not something which is always readily visible to the occasional visitor. Remember that such love grows in the environment of a commitment to a local church, and it manifests itself in actions as well as words.
4. Look for a church where discipline is practised in accordance with Scripture [*Matt* 18.15-17; 1 *Cor* 5]. (See my booklet, *Biblical Church Discipline* for details).
5. Look for a church which demonstrates the Lord's compassion for the lost by works of evangelism and mercy [*Matt* 9.36-38, 14.14; *Mark* 6.34; *Luke* 10.25-37].

6. You are duty-bound not to affiliate with any church which denies any of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith, such as are summarized (for example) in the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed; and in such passages as Romans 1.1-6, 1 Corinthians 15.3-5. The churches of Christ are clearly responsible to uphold God's truth; therefore this is a vital criterion when choosing a church [see 1 *Tim* 3.15; 2 *Tim* 1.13, 14, 2.2; *Jude* 3]. A true church will place a strong emphasis upon the importance of truth.

On the other hand, let us remember that love for the truth should not exist in isolation from love for people, especially those of the household of faith [*Gal* 6.10]. Sometimes one will encounter churches which are strict in their adherence to theological orthodoxy, while neglecting love and works of evangelism and mercy (as mentioned in paragraphs 3 and 5). Seek a church which is trying to practise all of these virtues together. We should be as zealous for love and mercy as we are for truth, and *vice versa*.

7. Recognize that there is no such thing as a perfect local church. Neither the pastor, nor the other officers, nor the people can be expected to please you in every particular. Nor should you be surprised to find inconsistencies even in good churches.

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