

Find the Right Church

One of the keys to spiritual growth is to become part of a local church. In its biblical form, the church should provide biblically-sound teaching, genuine worship, an atmosphere in which Christians are able to use their God-given gifts and abilities, and spiritual leadership that will help keep believers accountable.

There are those who might say, "I don't need to go to church. I like to spend my time alone with God, and I don't need to be around other Christians." The reality is that no Christian can endure or prosper long if he or she lives in isolation without the support of a church. No matter how many Christian books, magazines, CDs, and movies you have, they can't replace the experience and fellowship you get from attending church and being with other believers.

In the book of Hebrews, it says, "Let us not neglect our meeting together, as some do, but encourage each other, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near" (Hebrews 10:24-25).

A model for the modern-day church can be found in the book of Acts, which describes the early days of the church. The first-century church turned the world upside down, spreading the gospel around the known world.

The Bible has plenty to say about the characteristics of a healthy, vibrant church, and you can measure its vitality by comparing its qualities to the characteristics of the first-century church (Acts 2:42, 44-47).

A healthy church meets together regularly, places a high priority on Bible study and develops caring people who concern themselves with the well-being and spiritual development of each member. It recognizes the power of corporate prayer and worship and demonstrates Christ's love in meaningful ways. Its members desire to minister to others and seek to share God's good news with others.

In any Biblically-sound, God-centered church, the following beliefs should be obvious:

- The Bible is held as the inspired and only infallible authoritative Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16).
- God is eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit (John 14:26, Matthew 28:18, 19).
- Salvation is the free gift of God to all who will repent of their sins and acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is the only way to come into a relationship with God (John 14:6, Ephesians 2:8-9).

A healthy church is also a growing church. But growth alone should not necessarily be viewed as proof of God's blessing. The first disciples had a "gladness and a singleness of heart" about the early church. Your church home should be a place you look forward to attending not only on Sundays, but throughout the week.

Conversely, if you feel uncomfortable about your church, it may be the Holy Spirit telling you that church is unscriptural. As you grow in your understanding of the Scriptures and seek God's will through prayer, you will be able to discern truth from error.

Avoid any group that teaches doctrines, beliefs, or rituals that deviate from the Bible. Many false teachers speak only parts of the truth and their messages have been aptly described as the "skin of the truth stuffed with a lie." Most cults are identifiable because they refuse to:

- Adhere solely to the 66 books of the Bible. Instead, they add their "special revelations."
- Accept that our relationship to Jesus Christ has been provided by God through His grace and is received through faith alone. Instead they practice salvation by works.
- Acknowledge Jesus Christ as the divine Son of God and give Him the full recognition He merits.

Commonly known cults are Jehovah's Witnesses, Latter-Day Saints or Mormons, Unification Church, Unitarians, Spiritists, and Scientologists.

Find Your Place

It has been wisely said, "The church is a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints." Regular fellowship and participation in the church for a disciple cannot be overemphasized. As you come to church and find your place in it, you will then be in a position to give to others what God has given to us.

The church that is right for you will be a place where you can grow in your love for the Lord and serve Him by contributing to the life of the church. Remember, we are all sinners doing our best to follow God's teaching. Rely on Him to show you the way.

Remember that the model for a God-honoring church is in the Scriptures. Study God's design and pray to be led to the place He has prepared for you. God bless you as you grow in your faithfulness.