

Village Baptist Church

What to look for in a church

If you are looking for a church to attend and be involved in, there are several things that you need to know about what the Church is and the things to look for in selecting the right one. This is a brief summary of how best to go about finding the right church.

Know the purpose of the church

First, you must understand that the purpose of the church gathered is not to provide personal gratification. True needs are met in the context of ministry, but the church is not a vending machine where you put in a token and select your favorite snack. The church is not man centered, and in a man-centered world it is easy to see the church as a means to meet all of "my" felt needs. The church is the Body of Christ called together to give attention to the Apostles teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer (Acts 2:42). It is a place of proclamation, of discipling, of equipping for ministry and service, and of worship. The metaphor of the human body found in 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 is very instructive in this regard, we all have ministry duties to carry out to the glory of God. It should be our first desire to be those "living stones" in the spiritual house that God is building.

Determine the quality of a church

Secondly, when stepping into a church service it is important to remember that the spiritual quality of the church is *not* determined by

- the number and scope of it's programs
- its size
- its age
- its location in the community
- whether or not it has a building
- its music and worship style
- the racial, social, and ethnic make up of the congregation

So then, if these are not important what is important? What type of questions should you be asking?

- *Is this church built on the right foundation?* - The one and only foundation of the Church is the life and work of Jesus Christ. "For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 3:11) It is important to find out what a church believes concerning the essentials of the historic Christian Faith. For example, what does this church believe...
 - Concerning the Scripture as the sole and sufficient voice of God? What are their views on inspiration, authority, infallibility, etc?
 - Concerning man and sin? Who is man? How lost is man? What is sin? How pervasive is sin?
 - Concerning the triune God and Jesus Christ? What do they believe regarding the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in His deity and humanity, the work of the cross and the

resurrection?

- Concerning the means of salvation? How is man saved? Is Salvation presented as grace given as gift through believing faith or is it contingent upon faith plus some combination of works?
- *Is the church being built with the tools and materials that honor God and will last into eternity? Or with the pragmatic tools of our age which are used to gather a crowd?* - Paul uses the metaphor of building with gold, silver and precious stone or wood, hay and straw. (1 Cor. 3:10-15) God has ordained that man is saved through the preaching of the gospel and believing faith (Romans 1:16, 17), and sanctification is accomplished through the ministry of the Spirit and the Word (2 Timothy 3:14-17 and Hebrews 4:12). Growth that results from anything else other than the Word of God and the clear proclamation of the gospel will perish in the fire. Tools of our modern age that are used to build organizations and man's kingdom are not valid nor are they God honoring.
- *Are you in agreement with the Church's theological distinctive?* - Most community churches are denominational under the surface, therefore it is necessary to ask about the nature and mode of baptism, who is baptized, gifts of the Spirit, the Lord's Supper, and the Church's broader theological beliefs. If you are not in total agreement, are you able to pass over the differences?
- *Are the lives of the Pastor(s) and church leadership above reproach as per the requirements of Scripture? (1 Tim. 3)* - Is the Pastor called, spiritually qualified, and equipped for ministry?

What are some positive things to look for in the church? It is important to remember that no church is going to be perfect, but does it work toward discharging its responsibilities as church. We need to ask the following questions:

- Does the Word of God have a high place in public ministry?
- Is the name of Christ lifted up during worship or is worship man centered?
- Is this a place where I can use my gifts in ministry?
- Is the gospel being proclaimed and new believers disciplined?
- Does the church utilize disciplinary measures when necessary?

When to leave a church (or not)

Are you already attending a church and looking for a new one? Perhaps you've found the 'perfect' church (according to the criteria listed above), and you're ready to move on. Are you leaving your current church family for the right reasons? The following examples illustrate times when *not* to leave your church.

- When you disagree with the leadership or someone in the church over cultural or ministry issues not specifically addressed in the Scripture. There must be room for Christian Liberty. These would include areas such as choices of Bible translations, music, clothing, worship, leadership style, etc. Differences should be discussed openly and honestly. Agreement is not necessary on all things indifferent.
- When you are disappointed with or have a conflict with other people. The church is composed of many different people who are on different levels in their Christian experience, if there is conflict, work out your differences, involve a mediator if necessary.
- When the preaching or the music or any of the programs or the facilities are perceived as weak. The perception of the grass being greener somewhere else may be true but it is not a valid reason to leave.
- When you have subjective feelings or impressions with no substance. "This does not feel like my church anymore," is not a reason to leave, even if others do. Commitment is a choice.
- When there is sin in the church. You have a responsibility to go to that person and in love, help them turn and be reconciled to God and the Church. (Gal. 6:1; Matt. 18:15-20)