

Marks of an Effective Church, Part 2

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 1307

REVIEW

Many kinds of churches exist in a variety of cultures. They minister in many ways through different gifts and offices. For that reason churches need not conform to the same patterns or use the same methods. However, some common denominators are true of every successful and effective church. They may be administered in different ways and accomplished through different means, but those factors must be present.

Not all successful churches have all those factors. But every church has some of them. The more they have, the more dynamic they are. We see those factors not only supported by Scripture, but also validated by effective churches in which they are being implemented.

I. AN EMPHASIS ON GODLY LEADERS

II. AN EMPHASIS ON FUNCTIONAL GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

III. AN EMPHASIS ON DISCIPLESHIP

IV. AN EMPHASIS ON PENETRATING THE COMMUNITY

V. AN EMPHASIS ON ACTIVE CHURCH MEMBERS Lesson

VI. AN EMPHASIS ON CONCERN FOR ONE ANOTHER

A. Stated

A dynamic church will be involved in the lives of its people. Many churches are simply places where people go to watch things happen. But the church cannot sit in isolation. Its members cannot merely come in, sit down, walk out, and say that they are involved in what the church is doing. The New Testament is full of exhortations about ministering our spiritual gifts and responding appropriately to others. We have a tremendous responsibility to serve one another.

Why Go to Church?

I was listening to a radio preacher scream at the top of his voice. He was in one of those "amen" kind

of congregations where you can hardly hear the preacher for all the people shouting back. For several minutes he kept saying, "When I was a boy, I remember when people went to church. What we need to do is go to church--we got to get back to church." But those people were already there. They didn't need to hear that! What he really needed to do was tell them what they were there for.

We've heard other people say that America needs to get back to church. However, America never found out what it was supposed to do when it went, so it left. Now we want people to come back, but we're still not telling them what to do when they get there!

Why do we go to church? Hebrews 10:24-25 says, "Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another." We don't attend church just to listen. We should be encouraging one another to do good. Every Christian ought to be like a battery that joins with other believers and corporately increases the church's output.

B. Supported

The New Testament has much to say about the response of believers toward one another. Being concerned about others is an important theme in Scripture.

1. By the epistles

a

) James 5:16--We are to confess our sins one to another.

b

) Colossians 3:13--We are to forgive one another.

c

) Galatians 6:2--We are to bear one another's burdens.

d

) Titus 1:13--We are to rebuke one another.

e

) 1 Thessalonians 4:18--We are to comfort one another.

f

) Hebrews 10:25--We are to exhort one another.

g

) Romans 14:19--We are to edify one another.

h

) Romans 15:14--We are to admonish one another, which refers to counseling with a view toward changing behavior.

i) James 5:16--We are to pray for one another.

All those one anothers clearly indicate the responsibilities that Christians have toward each other.

2. By the Lord

Our Lord Jesus Christ was involved with individuals. He was a caring, sensitive, loving friend who personally interacted in the lives of others. He brought joy to a wedding. He associated with drunkards that needed help, even to the extent that people started calling Him one too. He met with weak and unimportant people and made them eternally important. He met with perverse and hostile people and revealed a warmth that made Him approachable.

a) The man oppressed with demons

When Jesus arrived in the country of the Gadarenes near the Sea of Galilee, He was met by a mad man who "cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the Most High God?" (Mark 5:7). The man was demon-possessed. He "had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains; for he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces; neither could any man tame him" (vv. 3-4). Obviously people avoided him! But Jesus took care of him. After Jesus cast the demon out, the villagers found the man "sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind" (v. 15). Jesus got involved in one man's life and transformed it.

b) The woman afflicted with hemorrhaging

As Jesus was walking among a crowd of people pressing around Him, a woman grabbed one of the tassels on His robe, hoping to be healed (Mark 5:24-29). "Jesus, immediately knowing in himself that power had gone out of him, turned about in the crowd, and said, Who touched my clothes? And his disciples said unto him, Thou seest the multitude crowding thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me?" (vv. 30-31). Jesus then identified the woman and graciously healed her (v. 34).

c) The woman caught in adultery

Some scribes and Pharisees caught a woman in the act of adultery and brought her to Jesus. They hoped to accuse Jesus of undermining the law of Moses (John 8:3-6), but He "stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted himself up, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her" (vv. 6-7). Without condemning her, Jesus told her to "go, and sin no more" (v. 11).

The church must be a loving community that shares with one another. So often we think we've done our job if we've gone to church--we've sat down, listened, got back in the car, and went about our business. God help us if that's our perspective of what a church should be.

VII. AN EMPHASIS ON DEVOTION TO THE FAMILY

A. The Trend in the Modern Church

There was a time when the family functioned as a unit. Every member went to church together and even sat in the same pew every Sunday. But as the church became program-oriented, everyone went off and did their own thing. Groups were formed to counteract the loss of identity in our rapidly growing technological society. Old people became known as senior citizens. Children identified with youth groups that, in many cases, set the pace for the rest of the church. Soon the church began to leave the parents behind. However, there needs to be a balance of emphasis on all family members.

B. The Testimony of the Word of God

The importance of the family is stressed many places in Scripture.

1. The command to honor your parents

Exodus 20:12 records the fifth of the Ten Commandments: "Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee."

2. The consequences for dishonoring your parents

a) Stated

(1) Exodus 21:15, 17

The consequences of dishonoring one's parents give us an idea of how serious God is about the matter: "He that smiteth his father, or his mother, shall be surely put to death" (v. 15). I'll never forget seeing a friend of mine punch his father so hard that he knocked him into a bathtub. Some people might think that's funny, but God doesn't. Such an action would have been cause for capital punishment in the Old Testament. Many of you might never hit your father or mother, but would you think evil thoughts about them or curse them? Verse 17 says, "He that curseth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death." Execution was God's punishment for such disrespect.

God wants order and respect in the family. He does not want you to hit your parents, nor curse them either. Do you know young people who say bad things about their parents? That would have been worthy of death in the Old Testament. God is serious about the responsibility of family members to each other. We must teach young people about the responsibility they have toward their parents.

(2) Proverbs 30:11-17

(a) The problem

You may identify with the description of unruly children in Proverbs 30. Much of it applies to young people today. Verse 11 says, "There is a generation that curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother." In many cases, mothers and fathers don't deserve honor, but that doesn't excuse the children from giving it.

Verse 12 says, "There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet are not washed from their filthiness." They think they have no need for their parents' instruction, assuming they have all the answers. But they don't realize how bad off they are. Verses 13-14 say, "There is a generation, oh, how lofty are their eyes! And their eyelids are lifted up [in pride]. There is a generation, whose teeth are like swords, and their jaw teeth like knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men." When a prideful younger generation grows up, it takes advantage of others. We have seen evidence of that in America. Some of the nation's finest men compromised their principles for personal gain in incidents like Watergate.

(b) The picture

Verse 15 illustrates prideful rebellion: "The horseleach hath two daughters, crying, Give, give." A

horseleach is an insect that leaches blood from horses. A prideful generation is like a horseleach in that it takes anything it can out of society yet never is satisfied.

(c) The punishment

Verse 17 says, "The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it." That's strong language. When you read something like that, you get the idea that God is serious about children's honoring their parents.

The Pastor Who Cared for His Kids

One of the great disasters in the ministry concerns pastors who don't take care of their family because they are too busy with other things. I remember hearing Dr. Howard Hendricks of Dallas Theological Seminary relate a personal incident. Someone called him up and said, "Dr. Hendricks, we're having a Bible conference, and we want you to be our speaker. Can you come?" Hendricks politely declined. The conference planner replied, "This is a crucial event for our whole community. Why can't you come? Do you have another appointment?" Hendricks said, "No. I've got to play with my kids." "You've got to play with your kids?" questioned the planner. "Don't you realize that our people need your instruction?" "Yes. But my kids also need me." Dr. Hendricks was right. If a man of his far-reaching influence ever lost the respect of his kids, the credibility of his ministry would be gone, besides his heart being broken.

b) Illustrated

It's not wrong to play with your kids if you want to avoid ending up like Eli, the Old Testament priest. He took care of everyone's spiritual problems but apparently never took care of his own children. His sons, Hophni and Phinehas, turned out to be wicked men. In effect, God told Eli, "When I initiated the priesthood, I told Aaron and the others that they would be priests forever through the Aaronic lineage. But your sons have violated My law to such an extent that I'm going to call a halt to the priestly ministry of your family. To validate those words, Hophni and Phinehas are going to die the same day" (1 Sam. 2:27-34). Eli's heart was broken after hearing that.

I'll never forget a story I heard from a man who was constantly involved in evangelistic meetings. He overheard his boy asking a neighbor to play. The other boy said, "I can't do anything with you because I've got to go with my Dad. We're going to the park to play." The evangelist's son said, "Oh. My Dad can't play with me; he's too busy playing with other people's children." The evangelist said few things ever affected him as much as that did.

Christians have an obligation to their families. A strong Christian family is a high priority. And there is a high price to pay if we don't make it a priority. Therefore, we must strive to develop solid marriages and family-oriented ministries by teaching husbands to love their wives (Eph. 5:25), wives to submit to their husbands (5:22), children to obey their parents (6:1), and parents not to exasperate their children but to nurture them (6:4).

VIII. AN EMPHASIS ON BIBLE TEACHING AND PREACHING

A. The Focal Point

At the heart of a dynamic church is solid teaching and preaching. You can't make up for that with an anemic pulpit that offers sermonettes for Christianettes, pious platitudes, and entertaining stories. The heartbeat of the church is a dynamic presentation of the truth of God.

The Blessing of Verse-by-Verse Preaching

When Dr. W.A. Criswell went to the First Baptist Church of Dallas, he was only the second pastor in its history. He had been preceded by another great man of God, George Truett. As Criswell took over the pulpit, he told the board that he planned to teach the Bible verse-by-verse. It may have concerned some that he might empty the place, but the church went on to be one of the largest in the world, with nearly 18,000 members. (His eventful life's story is told in W.A. Criswell by Billy Keith [Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell], 1973.) All those people came because he taught them the Word of God. Their lives changed as they understood and then responded to it.

There's no substitute for Bible teaching from the pulpit. It's the church's rallying point--the one common denominator that propels the church forward. Without it church members could not effectively grow in their spiritual lives.

B. The False Priorities

1. No preaching

Some have suggested we shouldn't have churches like we have today--that we should get rid of the buildings and make the family the common unit of Christian assembly, with the father serving as the priest. That would be ideal in theory, except there are many fathers who don't practice that ideal. If they don't teach their wives and kids, someone has to. Such a program might work to some extent, but ultimately it would fail because of the absence of a definite preaching ministry.

If you examine the life of Christ and the book of Acts, you'll find that preaching was a constantly reoccurring theme. You can't eliminate what God uses because everyone doesn't accept it. First Corinthians 1:18 says, "The preaching of the cross is still to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God."

The proclamation of God's truth by preaching (Gk., k[ma]erugma) and teaching (Gk., didach[ma]e) changes lives. That is why all dynamic churches teach biblical truth and motivate Christians to apply it.

2. Positive preaching

Some believe that preaching should make everyone feel good. Suppose a man has an unhappy life: he works hard for an unfair boss, he's henpecked at home, his kid is a delinquent, and he can't make payments on his car. When he comes to church, he shouldn't be smashed from pillar to post. Therefore some think that preaching ought to emphasize positive thinking that assumes everything is

wonderful and rosy.

I once saw a Christian television program where the preacher said, "Oh, every day with Jesus is so happy! If you could only be as happy as I am!" However, that wouldn't go over very well with the wife who has just returned from the cemetery where she buried her husband, or with the mother whose little child has been diagnosed as having terminal leukemia. Every day is not a happy day. Every day is fulfilling and there is an abiding joy in the presence of Christ, but Christianity is not a slaphappy way of life. If all we're supposed to do is come together and tell each other how wonderful life is, then we're all lying.

3. Problem preaching

Others think preaching should be geared toward helping people solve their problems. We live in a world that is so psychologically oriented, it seems like we can hardly think without getting into clinical analysis. We can't objectively accept anything without analyzing it. That reasoning has carried over into the church and has developed what I call "problem-centered preaching." It is where the preacher states a problem and gives ten verses out of context on how to solve it, along with a few stories about some people who solved it.

A pastor isn't a glorified psychoanalyst, a grandfather, or a Santa-Claus type who pats you on the head and tells you everything is fine. His task is to educate Christians in the Word of God and encourage them to change their behavior in conformity to it. In many cases it is better for a person to feel worse before he feels better because there has to be healing before there can be restoration. When I preach a sermon that convicts those who hear it, I know the message is getting through. A church pulpit isn't primarily designed to help people make decisions about the details of everyday living. It is meant to teach them the Word of God and identify what sin is so that they might change their behavior. Pacifying one's problems doesn't make a person feel better. Rather confessing, repenting, and changing one's life is what produces true joy and enables one to deal with one's problems.

IX. AN EMPHASIS ON A WILLINGNESS TO CHANGE

There's nothing sacred about tradition. We must distinguish carefully between the unchangeable and what must be changed. A dynamic church should regularly burst out of old methods that are no longer effective. Note also that faith demands risk. A church can become so comfortable with unchanging forms that its members lose sight of what they are there for. But if it lives on the precipice of change, there will be a sense of vitality.

A. The Issues of Change vs. Tradition

1. The times of worship

The church hasn't always had the same format for the worship service that we have today. The apostle Paul adapted to change. He taught anywhere from one to seven days a week. That intensity in preaching takes place today in some places in Africa, where many Christians gather at daybreak on Sunday and return home when the sun goes down.

I've preached in black churches in the South where I would finish one sermon and the congregations would say, "Brother, preach another one!" I'd turn the page in my notebook and take off on another passage. I have preached as many as three or four sermons in a row in situations like that. Contrast that with the more prevalent attitude of twelve o'clockitis: "It's twelve o'clock and the sermon is still going on! Give me a break!"

Some people aren't very adaptable to change. They would collapse if there were no Sunday morning worship. Suppose we said, "We won't be meeting on Sunday mornings any more because of the energy crisis. Therefore we're going to meet in different places around the city on Tuesday evening." That shouldn't be a major problem for any believer because every day is sacred to the Christian. We enjoy being together on the day of the week that commemorates our Lord's resurrection, but that shouldn't prevent us from changing when it is necessary to do so.

2. The place of worship

Many people wrongly identify the church as the building itself. Christendom has canonized the form of the church and then has struggled to make it relevant. We live with incidental patterns for the church that we have made into institutions.

Many Christians retreat from the world to the church because they feel secure there. That thinking illustrates how threatened some Christians feel. That they find security in a building is a sign they want to identify with something, and that's not bad in itself. People like routine because it's much less threatening than something that's constantly changing. But bricks aren't sacred, and the order of worship is not inspired. There must be change in a church or it will stagnate. True fellowship results from the presence of God's Spirit. God is busy not just on Sunday mornings, but throughout the week in the lives of His people. He doesn't work in buildings; He works in the hearts of people.

How to Be Flexible

There are three keys in helping a church maintain an attitude of flexibility.

1. Recognize that spiritual life takes precedence over structure

What goes on in a Christian's life outside the church is more important than what goes on inside its walls. The church building is not God's house; the believer is (1 Cor. 6:19). Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest translates 2 Corinthians 6:16 as follows: "As for us, we are an inner sanctuary of the living God" (The New Testament, An Expanded Translation [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980], p. 426).

2. Be open to the Holy Spirit

If the Holy Spirit is the One behind change, believers should be ready and willing to change.

3. Make sure that procedure follows needs

To remain spiritually alive, a church must adapt to the needs of the people. If society changes, then the church must be flexible so it can minister effectively. A church mustn't say, "We've never done it that way before" if that's the way God wants it done now.

B. The Illustration of Change vs. Tradition

Some people easily confuse a form, which is changeable, with truth, which is unchangeable. They often assume that the church--the bastion of truth--is an unchangeable form.

1. The context

Matthew 15:1 says, "Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, who were of Jerusalem." The scribes and Pharisees continually found fault with what Jesus and His disciples were doing. The scribes had instituted a plethora of rules that were not binding in God's eyes. Those rabbinical traditions were not laws inspired by God. Rather, they were legalistic rules that enabled people to exalt themselves since they could keep them more easily than true laws of God.

2. The confusion

One of the rules the scribes established was that before they ate, they had to go through a ceremonial procedure of purifying themselves. It was a meaningless religious exercise. Jesus' disciples didn't follow those procedures. Therefore, the Pharisees and scribes accused them of breaking tradition, saying in verse 2, "Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they wash not their hands when they eat bread."

When our church changed the order of the worship service and put some music at the end, someone asked why we did that. He liked the music at the beginning of the service because we'd always had it at the beginning. He was bound by a tradition with relatively little significance. He needed to understand that human tradition can never be equated with divine authorization.

3. The contrast

Jesus answered the legalists who sought to condemn Him, saying, "Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?" (v. 3). That the disciples didn't obey rabbinic traditions was of little consequence compared to the scribes and Pharisees' disobedience to God's commands. Jesus elaborated on His justified condemnation of them by saying, "For God commanded, saying, Honor thy father and mother; and he that curseth father or mother, let him die the death" (v. 4). That commandment required a child to respect and care for his parents. But instead of providing financially for their parents, the scribes and Pharisees justified their disobedience by "consecrating" their money to God (vv. 5-6). Jesus called them hypocrites for accusing His disciples of breaking their arbitrary traditions while they were disobeying God's authoritative laws (v. 7).

4. The condemnation

Jesus then quoted Isaiah's prophetic indictment of the Jewish leaders: "In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (v. 9; Isa. 29:13). They didn't know the difference

between what was tradition and what was divine command. In a similar way, the church has confused people so that they don't know the difference between what God instituted and what the church instituted.

X. AN EMPHASIS ON GREAT FAITH

Great churches live on the precipice of faith where they can do nothing else but trust God. They are accustomed to the tension of trusting God and accepting the risk that is inseparable from faith.

A. Exemplified

Consider Moses and how he stretched the faith of the Israelites. He led them out of Egypt, assuring them that God would protect them. When they reached the Red Sea, Pharaoh's army had caught up to them. But just in time God parted the Red Sea. Then trusting in the Lord, the people passed safely to the other side while Pharaoh's army was drowned. Once they were on the other side, the people wanted to know what they were going to do. So Moses explained that they were going to go through the desert to the Promised Land. Then the people wanted to know what they were to do for food. Moses said that God would drop food out of heaven for them. And He did.

B. Exhorted

One can't live a godly life without risk. Although faith is inseparable from risk, it is ironic that Christians generally dislike anything risky. Since Ephesians 3:20 says God "is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us," we need to believe Him for that. Hebrews 11 lists heroes of faith. They believed God and took risks. That's another way of saying they trusted in Him. Daniel believed God and went into a lions' den. Abraham believed God when Sarah was too old to have a baby, and God delivered the promised child.

Christianity's approach is not "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." Christians should not be afraid of moving ahead with new ideas. Unfortunately, that's what happens in many churches. People who want to move out for God are often restrained by those who hold the purse strings and lack great faith. They create a bottleneck that prevents God's work from expanding. A church may have all kinds of great plans, but if it can't trust God to supply the manpower and the money, they will never be accomplished. God never had a problem getting money for what He wants done. It's exciting to see that kind of faith work wonders.

XI. AN EMPHASIS ON SACRIFICE

A spirit of sacrifice is directly related to the previous point. The leadership of an effective church doesn't have to plead for its people to be involved or to give because the congregation's faith should enable them to stretch themselves sacrificially. It shouldn't have a need for gimmicks, drives, and artificial means of stimulating its people to do what they ought to do. The members of such a church have a sacrificial spirit of giving like the Macedonians had, who poured out love by giving "beyond

their ability" (2 Cor. 8:3, NASB). Paul commended the Philippians for meeting his needs (Phil. 4:10, 14-16). He didn't have to ask them for anything because their love abounded to him in such a generous and tangible way.

XII. AN EMPHASIS ON WORSHIPING GOD

What especially makes a church great is its emphasis on worship. A church can emphasize many things that are good. But often they are overemphasized and the means become the end. When a program becomes an end in itself, anything becomes permissible in the process of accomplishing it. In such cases there is no base of integrity and the church compromises its principles.

Some churches' entire orientation is around their theological distinctives. They claim to be the only ones who believe a certain way. Sometimes those distinctives are part of their title. They might be the First Sovereign, Premillennial, Pretribulational, Antiliberal, Proconservative, Uncompromising Church of Oak Street. Strong biblical theology is important, but there's more to the thrust of the church than that.

Churches that glorify their uniqueness often become caricatures. Some churches focus entirely on the Person of Christ. I'm not against focusing on Christ, but I'm concerned about churches that act as if the rest of the Trinity doesn't exist. In a similar way, other churches focus primarily on the Holy Spirit. In contrast to those imbalanced approaches, the church is to be preoccupied with the entire Trinity. The church is to worship God in His fullness.

When a church sets its complete focus on God and does everything it can to honor Him, it has a base for uncompromising integrity. It doesn't matter what makes the church unique or what theological distinctive it has. What matters is what God requires.

CONCLUSION

May the twelve marks of an effective church be the basis of every Christian church so that God may be fully honored.

Focusing on the Facts

1. Why can't church members merely walk in and out of church and say they're involved?
2. According to Hebrews 10:24-25, why do we go to church?
3. What are some of the responses we are to have toward other believers?

4. Give some examples of how Jesus showed His intense concern for others.
5. What has the trend toward the family been in the modern church?
6. What were the consequences in the Old Testament for striking or cursing one's parents? What does that tell us about God's perspective on respecting authority?
7. What mistake did Eli the priest make in handling his ministry and his sons?
8. What are some keys to having a healthy family according to Ephesians 5-6?
9. What should be the focal point of a dynamic church's ministry?
10. Should every day be a happy day for a Christian? Explain.
11. What is a preacher's task with regard to his congregation and the Word of God?
12. What should be a church's attitude toward change?
13. In what way do many people wrongly identify the church?
14. How can a church maintain an attitude of flexibility?
15. Explain how the scribes and Pharisees confused changeable form with unchangeable truth (Matt. 15:1-9).
16. Explain the relation of faith to risk.
17. Why doesn't the leadership of an effective church have to plead for its people to be involved or to provide financial support?
18. What group of Christians did Paul commend for their sacrificial spirit of giving?
19. What should the church's primary goal be? What can happen when a church overemphasizes its programs?

Pondering the Principles

1. Are you instructing your children to respect you as parents? Do they see a respect for authority in your own life? Do you honor your parents, obey governmental laws, and treat your employer with respect? Or do they see indifference as you justify bending society's rules and regulations? Do they

see hypocrisy in your life and therefore lose respect for you? Or do they see uncompromising integrity in your life and honor you by following your example? Do you spend time with your children so you can transfer your godly value system to them? If your family is struggling to be the type of loving family God desires, make sure you invest time in serving and communicating with each other. Consult the numerous books and tape series that are available on the subject of the family. If your church is lacking a ministry to families, prayerfully consider with your pastor how that need might be met.

2. Faith demands risk. You may be trusting God to work through your life, but are you risking anything? Are you taking chances with your comfort, future plans, popularity, job, or life as you serve the Lord in faith? Are you willing to risk those things to live a life of dependency on Him? Read Hebrews 11. What risks did the Old Testament characters take, knowing that God is faithful in His promises? In spite of the temporary hazards you may encounter, begin trusting God for things that will stretch your faith. Then when He does them, you will know to give Him the credit.

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