

HOW TO CHOOSE A CHURCH

Lesson 6

I. A HEALTHY CHURCH IS SPIRITUAL

“Above everything else, a church should be known for its spirituality,”

Local churches, like people, soon develop a reputation. In his first letter to the Thessalonian believers, Paul noted their reputation for being a church characterized by loving labor, steadfastness, faith, and service (I Thessalonians 1:2-10).

Other churches in the New Testament were not characterized by their spirituality, but by their spiritual immaturity (I Corinthians 3:1-4).

The church at Laodicea (Revelation 3:14-22) could only be described as "lukewarm" spiritually. Content in their abundance of material things, they were chided by Christ as being spiritually poor.

The spirituality of a church can often be seen in its attention to the basic spiritual disciplines of the faith.

The church at Jerusalem immediately after Pentecost focused on doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer (Acts 2:42). The church at Antioch was another model of spiritual power. Out of their experience of worship, prayer, and fasting the Lord called Barnabas and Saul (Acts 13: 1- 5) to plant the Gospel throughout the Roman world.

Joyful worship, attention to the Scriptures and prayer, and fellowship in the Spirit characterize the spiritual church both in the New Testament and in our own world today.

II. A HEALTHY CHURCH HAS A WORLD VISION

A. God's purpose for his people in the Old Testament, the nation of Israel, was for them to be a missionary people.

A. God addressed the people of Israel through Isaiah saying, "I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations... " (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6). God has the same purpose today for the new covenant community, the church, "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" -- who are called to "declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness" (I Peter 2:9),

C. God's salvation is not reserved for any particular group or people. The church has been commissioned by the risen Lord to make disciples among "all nations" or ethnic groups (Matthew 28: 19). This same vision and compassion for the whole world was expressed in

Jesus' promise to the disciples that they would be his witnesses from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth (Acts 1: 8).

A truly New Testament church has a vision, compassion, and burden that extends from its immediate community to the entire world. It was God's love for the entire world that prompted his sacrifice of the supreme gift, his only Son (John 3:16).

III. A HEALTHY CHURCH IS A SERVANT CHURCH

- A.** By maintaining a servant's posture, the church reflects the model of Jesus Himself, who came "not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:58).
- B.** Jesus declared that such servanthood should be the mark of the Christian community. "Whoever should be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave" (Matthew 20:26-27).
- C.** The Apostle Paul reminds us that both the message and the service for "ministry" of reconciliation has been committed to the church. "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18).

The church must resist the temptation to serve itself and always focus its ministry upon the world for which Christ died. The church must always have the mind of Christ, forever emptying itself of selfishness and assuming the role of a servant (Philippians 2:5-6).

IV. A HEALTHY CHURCH IS A FRIENDLY CHURCH

- A.** The exercise of Christian hospitality is a practical expression of the love which characterizes the community of believers.
- B.** One of the greatest avenues of ministry open to the church today is that of hospitality, which literally means, "love of strangers."
- C.** The ministry of hospitality is rooted in the Old Testament concern for the stranger within the gates of Israel (Exodus 22:2; 23:9).
- D.** The Jewish law insisted that strangers be treated on a level par with widows and priests (Deuteronomy 14:29).
- E.** The opening of one's home and sharing of resources in showing hospitality is the responsibility of every believer.

Romans 12:13 simply exhorts us to "practice hospitality." It should be practiced ungrudgingly (1 Peter 4:9), with the awareness that even angels may be sent by God in disguise to sample our "love of strangers" (Hebrews 13:2).

The exercise of hospitality is an indispensable ingredient in the life of the church. Through the ministry of hospitality, the church family is strengthened, the stranger welcomed, and the church grows.

YOUR MOVE:

These lessons are being provided by our local church. We pray that our church reflects each of the seven qualities of a healthy church. How does our church meet each guideline? Give specific examples.

HOW THE HOLY SPIRIT WORKS

Lesson 7

The Holy Spirit is the third member of the Trinity. He is a person, just as interested in us as God the Father or Jesus (John 14:16). The Holy Spirit has been working since creation in our world to affect our lives (Genesis 1: 1- 2). The Bible shows the Spirit was active in the birth of Christ (Luke 1: 35) and in the earthly ministry of our Lord (Acts 10:38). He was involved in the inspiration of Scripture and is presently a part of the work of redemption (John 3:5). He calls men to preach the Gospel (Acts 13:2) and directs them where to work (Acts 16:6-10). The Holy Spirit has played a positive role in your becoming a Christian. We will deal in this lesson with how the Holy Spirit has worked in your life in the past and what he will do in the future for you as you walk in obedience to God's guidance and his Word.

I. BEFORE YOU WERE SAVED, THE HOLY SPIRIT DID THE FOLLOWING:

A. *He convicted you of your sins - 1 John 5:5-7*

It is the Holy Spirit who showed your sins to you and helped you realize you needed Christ. He continually speaks to you when other people don't know your needs. His constant convicting plays a vital part in your salvation.

B. *He pointed you to Christ - John 16:13-15*

Christ promised in these verses that when the Spirit would come, he would not be revealing himself, but he would be revealing Christ. The Spirit would also show you about Christ.

II. WHEN YOU WERE BORN AGAIN, THE HOLY SPIRIT DID THE FOLLOWING:

A. *You were renewed and regenerated - Titus 3:5-7:*

"He saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit"

B. *He brought life to you - Romans 8:11*

"If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you,

he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you."

C. *He witnessed to your salvation - Roman 8:16*

"It is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God."

III. NOW THAT YOU ARE BORN AGAIN, THE HOLY SPIRIT WANTS TO DO THE FOLLOWING:

A. *He wants to totally fill your heart and life - Ephesians 5:18*

"And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit"

B. *He wants to sanctify you entirely - 1 Thessalonians 5:23*

"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

C. *He wants to empower you to be a witness - Acts 1:8*

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."

D. *He wants to constantly dwell in you - John 14:17*

"even the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you."

E. *He wants to give you a gift so you can work for God - 1 Corinthians 12:11*

"All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills."

F. *He wants you to show the fruit of the Spirit in your life - Galatians 5:22*

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,

goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

- G. *He wants you to be free of the nature of sin - Romans 6:11-13***
 "Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God."

I. HOW CAN YOU RECEIVE THE FULNESS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN YOUR LIFE?

- A. *GIVE YOUR TOTAL SELF TO GOD -- Romans 12***

As a "living sacrifice" - Romans 12:1-2

The burnt offerings recorded in the Old Testament book of Leviticus were symbolic of the complete sacrifice a Christian should make. Every part of the sacrifice was to be completely burned. It was a detailed sacrifice. The "living sacrifice" of the Christian should be the same way. Nothing should be withheld.

As an act of worship - Romans 12:1-2

True spirituality is a continuation of our dedication to God. We are to present ourselves once and for all to God, but true spirituality is a continual, daily surrender.

We must be willing to be changed - Romans 12:2

Don't be conformed. We cannot let the world put us into its mold if we are to be effective Christians. We must be the salt of the earth. We cannot have the world's value system. We must not desire the world's approval above God's.

Be transformed. The Greek term for transformed is one from which we get our word metamorphosis. It speaks of the amazing change from a worm into a butterfly. We are to be changed from the inside until there is a change in every part of our lives.

To discover and prove God's will - Romans 12:2

When we make a total surrender to God, then, and only then, do we find the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God.

B. LET THE HOLY SPIRIT FILL YOU - EPHESIANS 5:18-21

There are five practical reasons why you will be a useful servant when you are filled with the Holy Spirit:

1. You can speak freely - Acts 4:20

The early Christians "could not help but speak" of what they had seen and heard. They were filled and they began to speak. We can tell how much a person loves Jesus by his inability to keep quiet about it.

2. You can sing joyfully - Ephesians 5:19

Singing is a sign of joy. Every Spirit-filled believer is happy. He has a song in his heart if not on his lips. Joy is a characteristic note in the book of Acts.

3. You can submit willingly - Ephesians 5:21

Pride does not want to submit to anyone or anything. However, in the heart where Jesus, the meek and lowly, resides, all pride is dispelled. Note that verse 21 does not refer to women only, but also to men.

4. You can share generously - Acts 4:34-35

The early church as recorded in the book of Acts was a sharing church. Its members had all things in common. They sold their lands to distribute to the poor. A Spirit-filled person will not be a selfish person.

5. You can see beyond immediate problems - Acts 7:59-60;11:24

Stephen is described as a man "full of faith and the Holy Spirit." When he was being martyred his face shone like an angel until Saul was convicted and later saved.

If we are going to be used by Christ, we must "... stay... until we are clothed with power from on high." (Luke 24:49) This was the key to the disciples' usefulness. Let it be a key for ours also.

C. MAKE LOVE YOUR AIM -- I CORINTHIANS 13:4-7

If Christ is to be seen and if we are to be useful, love will be our aim. All of us can mature more and more in this area. "And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment" (Philippians 1:9). The ultimate goal of our love should be characterized by the 15 qualities mentioned in I Corinthians 13:4-7:

Love is patient
 Love is kind
 Love is not jealous
 Love does not boast
 Love is not arrogant
 Does not act unbecomingly
 Love does not seek its own way
 Love is not provoked
 Love holds no grudges
 Love does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices with the truth
 Love bears all things
 Love believes all things
 Love hopes all things
 Love endures all things
 Love never fails!

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IV. BE RUGGEDLY HONEST -- Psalm 139:23-24

"Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me, and know my thoughts and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting"

Let God search your heart and then be honest with yourself when you find problems. When you are honest with God and yourself you can be truly honest with others.

V. BE YOURSELF -- I CORINTHIANS 12:12-20

As a member of the body of Christ you are unique. Don't try to pattern your life exactly by other Christians, but by what Christ says to you through his Word. You can be a vital part of the body of Christ without being identical to the other members.

There are many keys to usefulness. We studied only five. Ask God to show you how you can be more useful in your home, in your neighborhood, and in your church. It will be surprising what he shows you!

YOUR MOVE:

Jesus realized He would be leaving his disciples and would no longer be able to comfort them with his presence. But Jesus promised when He left He would send another to comfort them, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has taken the place of Christ on this earth to show you your sin and God's cure for your sin.

First become a Christian and repent of every known sin in your life.

Second, surrender yourself to God completely, as a living sacrifice. Yield every area of your life to God if you want the Holy Spirit to fill your heart and life.

"I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual act of worship. " Rom. 12:1-2

Third, ask the Holy Spirit to come and fill you. This verse shows that God the Father is anxious to give you the Holy Spirit.

"If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him." Luke 11:13

And then, put faith into the promises of God that when you ask, you will receive the Holy Spirit in His fullness. As you received forgiveness for sins by faith, so receive the Spirit's fullness by faith. As with your salvation, the evidence of answered prayer may come later; for now you are to believe.

"And this is the confidence which we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him" (1 John 5:14-15)

2 Timothy 1:14 Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you.