

Article: JAC227

HOW DO I FIND A GOOD CHURCH?¹

This article first appeared in the Ask Hank column of the *Christian Research Journal*, volume 28, number 6 (2005). For further information or to subscribe to the *Christian Research Journal* go to: <http://www.equip.org>

"They [followers of Christ] devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42).²

One of the questions I am most frequently asked is, "How do I find a good church?" This question has taken on added significance in recent years because of the massive impact televangelism has had on our culture. In all too many cases, worship has been replaced with entertainment, and fellowship has been transformed into individualism. In view of these cultural developments, it is critical that Christians have a handle on the ingredients of a healthy well-balanced church.

The first sign of a healthy, well-balanced church is a pastor who is committed to leading the community of faith in the *worship* of God through prayer, praise, and proclamation. *Prayer* is so inextricably woven into the fabric of worship that it would be unthinkable to have a church service without it. From the very inception of the early Christian church, prayer has been a primary means of worshiping God. Through prayer, we have the privilege of expressing adoration and thanksgiving to the One who saved us, sanctifies us, and one day will glorify us. In fact, our Lord Himself set the pattern by teaching His disciples the Prayer of Jesus (Matt. 6:9–13).

Praise is another key ingredient of worship. Scripture urges us to "speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" (Eph. 5:19). Singing psalms is a magnificent means for intercession, instruction, and the internalization of Scripture. In addition, the great hymns of the faith have stood the test of time and are rich in theological tradition and truth. Spiritual songs, in turn, communicate the freshness of our faith. Thus, it is crucial that we preserve both a respect for our spiritual heritage and a regard for contemporary compositions.

Along with prayer and praise, *proclamation* is axiomatic to experiencing vibrant worship. Paul urged his protégé Timothy to "preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear" (2 Tim. 4:2–3). Church leaders must once again produce in their people a holy hunger for the Word of God; for it is through the proclamation of God's Word that believers are edified, exhorted, encouraged, and equipped.

Furthermore, a healthy, well-balanced church is evidenced through its *oneness*. Christ breaks the barriers of gender, race, and background and unites us as one under the banner of His love. Such oneness is tangibly manifested through community, confession, and contribution.

Community is visible in baptism, which symbolizes our entrance into a body of believers who are one in Christ. It is a sign and a seal that we have been buried to our old life and raised to newness of life through His resurrection power. In like fashion, Holy Communion is an expression of oneness. As we all partake of the same elements, we partake of that which the elements symbolize—Christ, through whom we are one. Our fellowship on earth, celebrated through communion, is a foretaste of the heavenly fellowship we will share when symbol gives way to substance.

A further expression of our oneness in Christ is our common *confession* of faith—a core set of beliefs, which have been rightly referred to as "essential Christianity." These beliefs, which have been codified in

the creeds of the Christian church, form the basis of our unity as the body of Christ. The well-known maxim bears repeating: "In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; and in all things, charity."

As with community and confession, we experience oneness through the *contribution* of our time, talent, and treasure. The question we should be asking is not "What can the church do for me?" but, "What can I do for the church?" The tragedy of modern Christianity is that when members of the body hurt, too often we relegate them to finding resources outside the walls of the church. That is precisely why the apostle Paul exhorts us to "share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality" (Rom. 12:13).

Finally, a healthy, well-balanced church is one that is committed to equipping believers to be effective *witnesses* to *what* they believe, *why* they believe, and *Who* they believe. In the Great Commission, Christ called believers not to make mere converts but to make disciples (Matt. 28:19). A disciple is a learner or follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, we must be prepared to communicate *what* we believe. In other words, we must be equipped to communicate the evangel (good news). If Christians do not know how to share their faith, they have never been through basic training. The gospel of Christ should become such a part of our vocabulary that presenting it becomes second nature.

We also must be equipped to share *why* we believe what we believe. As Peter put it, we must "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the *reason* for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Pet. 3:15). Too many today believe that the task of apologetics is the exclusive domain of scholars and theologians. Not so! The defense of the faith is not optional; it is basic training for *every Christian*.

In addition to being prepared to communicate the what and why of our faith, we must be empowered to communicate the *Who* of our faith. Virtually every theological heresy begins with a misconception of the nature of God. Thus, in a healthy well-balanced church believers are equipped to communicate such glorious doctrines of the faith as the Trinity and the deity of Jesus Christ. It is crucial that we, like the early Christian church, come to understand more fully the biblical concept of the priesthood of all believers. Clearly, it is not the pastor's calling to do the work of ministry single-handedly. Rather, the pastor is called "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature" (Eph. 4:12–13).

In short, we know we have discovered a good church if God is *worshiped* in Spirit and in truth through prayer, praise and the proclamation of the Word; if the *oneness* we share in Christ is tangibly manifested through community, confession, and contribution; and if the church is equipping members as *witnesses* who can communicate what they believe, why they believe, and Who they believe. Worship, Oneness, and Witness equal WOW!

— Hank Hanegraaff

NOTES

1. For further study see Hank Hanegraaff, "How to Find a Healthy Church," available from CRI at www.equip.org. Adapted from Hank Hanegraaff, *The Bible Answer Book* (Nashville: J. Countryman, 2004).
2. All Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.