

Finding a Good Church (1)

by Anton Bosch

Finding a good church requires looking beyond superficial factors and prioritizing sound doctrine and a zeal for God's Word.

Scripture: Matthew 18:20, 1 Corinthians 8:1, Ephesians 4:14, Colossians 3:16, 2 Timothy 4:3

Topics: "Church Membership", "Sound Doctrine"

Description

Anton Bosch addresses the common misconceptions and wrong priorities people have when searching for a good church. He emphasizes that the focus should be on honoring God in worship, seeking doctrinal correctness in teaching, and prioritizing spiritual growth over personal preferences or comfort. Bosch challenges the notion that bigger churches are better, highlighting the value of smaller congregations that are zealous for God's Word. He also warns against letting demographics, denominations, or personal enjoyment of messages dictate church choices, stressing the importance of sound doctrine and spiritual challenge.

Transcript

Beyond any doubt, the most frequent question I receive from people is: "I can't find a good church". There have been a number who have responded to the previous two articles (I don't have to go to church) with the same question.

There is no question that good churches are hard to find and that they are steadily declining in size and number. But, in trying to assist folk in this area, I have become aware that many people are asking the wrong questions.

To most people the first question revolves around worship. Many people tell me they had closed their minds to a church even before the first line had been sung. Either the music is too contemporary, too traditional, too professional or not professional enough. Our church, in Burbank, has a lot going for it (good teaching, warm fellowship, a desire to live the Gospel) but visitors seldom return and one of the main reasons is because we have not been blessed with musicians. That should be the last reason for making a decision against attending a good church, yet it is often the first. Even if the worship is not to your liking, as long as it is not carnal, you need to stick around, listen to the ministry and meet the people before passing judgment. Remember that the purpose of worship is to bless God. It is not for our enjoyment, so the question we should be asking is not whether we enjoyed the worship, but whether God was honored by the worship.

One of the most important considerations for many is the size of the church. Invariably it the decision is based on the mistaken idea that bigger is better and that a crowd draws a crowd. The truth is that the bigger the congregation, the less likely that it will be a good church. Small does not guarantee anything, but the true churches will never be big. What is the smallest church you should consider? Don't consider anything smaller than two or three! (Matthew 18:20). These churches will be harder to find because they don't have advertising budgets and expensive properties, but they are worth finding.

The next order of priorities for many is things like a children's ministry, coffee, a nice building, comfortable seats and convenient parking. The importance of these things can be gauged by the prominence they take in the church's advertising. The bill board of a church down the street from us promotes "Jehovah Java". Beats me why anyone would want to go church for coffee when they can simply go to the local coffee shop, except if they are miserly to pay the going rate!

Many will reject a church because it does not have a children's ministry. Where does the Bible give the church the responsibility to train, entertain and educate the children? I thought that was the duty of the parents. Most people want a church with a nice building but did you know that the church that meets in a hired hall or a storefront is more likely to be zealous for God and His Word than the established congregation with the big mortgage who think that the church is the building? Nowhere in the New Testament were things like children's entertainment, accommodation, catering and personal comfort even thought of. They are symptomatic of our sick and perverted sense of values.

One of the decisive factors for many in choosing a church is that of demographics. Is the congregation made up of people my age, educational level, social standing, financial worth, professional status and most important; race? Off course no-one would admit to it, but it is the truth. Very few people are willing to cross these social and ethic barriers in their search for a church. And what a blessing that they don't because they would only contaminate a good church with their bigotry. It is best that people with that kind of intolerance die a lonely spiritual death than bring their sinful pride and prejudice into any church! Our common bond is Christ and nothing else. The only legitimate hindrance to fellowship in this regard is language - nothing else matters. The fact is that those that you look down on are more likely to be more spiritual than those you would like to associate with.

Somewhere at the bottom of the priorities is the question of whether people enjoyed the message. But this too is the wrong question. It is very likely that if you enjoyed the message that you were in the wrong place. There are even churches that preach a doctrinally correct message but its effect on people is to puff them up with knowledge and pride. Many flock to such churches because everything looks and sounds good, and they feel comfortable because there is no personal challenge to change their lifestyle. One of the other reasons why visitors do not like to return to our church is because the message is challenging. If the preacher does not leave you with something to think about (personally), he has not done his job. Yes, we also encourage, comfort and exhort but the Word is about doing more than about knowing or feeling.

The final question on most people's mind is whether the teaching is doctrinally correct. Yet this should be one of the highest priorities. It does not matter how much you like the church and how everything else seems to be a match, if the teaching is not truth or if it is void of sound doctrine then that is not a good church.

Somewhere near the top of most people's list is the question of denomination. Many will reject a church, sometimes without even attending a single meeting, just based on the denominational affiliation.

Personally, I don't like denominations but if you are really hungry, you do not mind what kind of label is stuck to the wrapping in which the loaf of bread comes. These days the denominational brand tells very little about the local congregation. You will find all extremes and balance in almost every denomination today. The only exception is cults where the activities of the branches are strictly controlled by the head honchos. So don't reject the church on the corner until you actually investigate it closely.

It seems to me that many people conclude that there is not a good church in their area by picking up the telephone directory or looking on the internet or driving past the buildings. Unfortunately there is no short-cut to the process of finding a church. You will have to physically pound the pavement and visit them one-by-one. Yes, some can be rejected because their errors are blatantly advertised (such as the Jehovah-Java church or the church down the street from our home where the distinguished feature and biggest service is bingo on Wednesday night).

Before you begin your search, you need to make sure you have the right attitude. I will address that next week. In the mean time you may want to take a piece of paper and list the things the Lord really wants you to have in a church - not what you want but what He wants.

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