

What Are YOU Looking For In A Church?

At this very moment, hundreds of thousands of our fellow Americans are looking for a church (or, as some express it, a "church home"). They are looking (1) because they have recently moved to a new area, (2) because they had drifted and are now ready for a renewal of religious interest in their lives, or (3) because they have become unhappy with "their old church." What are they looking for? What are YOU looking for? What do they hope to find? What do they feel they need?

* Some are looking for a church that is like the former church they belonged to. They don't want to change from the religion or way of worship that they have become accustomed to.

* Some are looking for a church (building) that is close to where they live. One that is within easy driving distance. They don't want to have to go very far to get to "church."

* Some are looking for a church made up of friendly people who will make them feel welcome and wanted. Warm feelings and caring hearts are important and a church that is cold and formal has no appeal.

* Some are looking for a church that will lift their spirits and build up their self-esteem. They want a sense of importance and belonging. They don't want a church whose members just never seem to accept them.

* Some are looking for a big church. They prefer to blend in with the crowd. They don't want a church that is so small they everyone is noticed and everyone is expected to chip in and help out.

* Some are looking for a small church because they don't want to be lost in a crowd. Smaller churches, it is believed, are more friendly and more like a family. They don't want a church that is so big that you don't know who the regulars are and who are the visitors.

* Some are looking for a church that is busy with all kinds of activities in the community. They like family affairs and youth groups. They want some good wholesome activities that young people can be a part of: a softball team, camping, lock-ins, etc., as long as there are several choices for a family to choose from.

Now, if you will, look back, over that list. There is not one word about God, Jesus, the Bible, salvation from sins, strengthening the soul, heaven or eternal life. Churches were established in the first century for the purpose of teaching God's word, saving souls and strengthening the members.

When a group of Christians constitute a church, they do not have to wonder what God wants of them. The lives they are to live, the organizational arrangement they are to have, the doctrine they are to teach, the collective work that they are to do are all clearly defined in the New Testament. With open Bibles we find out what a congregation of God's people is supposed to be, to teach, and to do.

Permit me to offer some suggestions:

* Look for a church that respects the sovereignty of God and the authority of Jesus Christ (Col. 3:17).

* Look of a church that respects the Bible as the inspired word of God, and the gospel as the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1: 16)

* Look for a church that strives to be like the churches you can read about in the New Testament - in name, in worship, in organization, in teaching and in work (I Thes. 2:14).

* Look for a church that is concerned about lost souls and eternal destinies (Mt. 28:19-20).

* Look for a church that ministers to the spiritual needs of men. It is the soul of man that will live forever (Eph. 4:11-16).

- by Steve Hardin

"There Must Be Heresies"

It is so discouraging. When it happens the hurt and disappointment can be devastating. The work and progress of the church can be set back for years. Friends and brethren are often alienated irreparably. Why must it be so? Why does it seem like church trouble is so common? How is it that these divisions are reported again and again? Is it inevitable? Are we destined to simply split, and split, and split again?

The Corinthian church had suffered through a good bit of trouble. In fact, Paul's first letter to them dealt primarily with internal problems in that congregation. If you had been a member there, surely you would have been discouraged by the divisiveness that characterized their history. Paul addressed these issues. He indicated that their problems were widely reported and he urged them that "that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1:10,11). He blamed the situation on their "carnal" outlook and rebuked them for their failure to grow spiritually (3:1-4).

While rebuking the Corinthians and stressing their need to grow past these issues which indicated their spiritual immaturity, Paul also revealed that such problems served a necessary role. Note: ". . . I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you" (11:18,19). Do you see it? The divisiveness, the arguing, the forming of sects and parties within the church, the disputes, etc., all served to demonstrate which ones were "approved" among the Corinthians. In other words, those who were faithfully committed to God, who were determined to live by His truth, who would not compromise with error - these would rise to the occasion. They would "be made manifest," that is, their faith and loyalty would become obvious to all that objectively considered the situation.

So, what about our "issues" today? Must we be content with the problems? Should we not worry about the divisions and the "church splits?" Of course, we must be concerned - such cannot be commended (11:22). Unfortunately, these things have always happened and will continue to happen as weak, carnal Christians do what they have always done. But, when these terrible problems arise, let us be committed to do the right thing. In the end, error will be exposed and those who do right will stand "approved" before God.

- by Greg Gwin