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 The Church

When it comes to the institution that we call a “Church” it is defined as a group of people who are called out of the world’s system by God’s grace for the purpose of assembling to worship and serve Christ. The “Church” is not the building; the building is the meeting place for this group of believers to assemble and worship God. Jesus said in Matthew 16:18 to Peter after he received the revelation from God the Father about who Jesus truly was, that “….upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” In these words, Christ promises to build His church on the truth of Peter’s and the other disciples’ confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. The church is presented as the people of God, the company of redeemed believers made possible by Christ’s death, and not a building. We have become so ingrained in our thinking today that the church is a building and have lost the spiritual concept of what Jesus meant when He said His church would be built on the confession of faith as to Who He is. First Corinthians 12:3b says “no man can say that Jesus is Lord, but by the Holy Spirit”, which happens according to Ephesians 1:13 that after you have heard the word of truth (the Gospel) and believed it, that you were sealed with the Holy Spirit at that moment. So according to Romans 10:9, 10 when you confessed what you believed in your heart you called Jesus Lord by the Holy Spirit and received your salvation making you a son/daughter of God. Jesus’ church is made up of people who have accepted Him into their heart. This is the church; people who are connected to God and not just a building.

This question was posed in a discussion one day: “Why exactly do you go to church?” That is the building. This has become the topic of discussion when we see the church losing it effectiveness in the earth today. Have we become so connected to a building that we have lost sight of the church being the body of Christ, and not understanding that no true church exists apart from a vital union of the members with Christ? The church is a pilgrim of people no longer belonging to this earth, whose function is to stand as a community in a living, personal relationship with God. First Peter 2:5 says, “you also as lively stones are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” Has the local church become so commercial and set on the physical building rather than building up people who will offer their life as a living sacrifice to God? Whenever anything other than building up the people spiritually becomes more important, we have lost the intent of what Jesus wanted the church to be. God’s design for this sacred gathering in a local building should involve worship, instruction, encouragement, evangelism, and ministry to those in need within the fellowship and those that are outside its’ walls.

When we look at the first century church in the book of Acts we see some important characteristics of a Spirit-filled church. In Acts 2:42 we are told that “they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship and in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” First, it is of utmost importance that a body of believers be nourished in the Word of God. There must be teaching of sound doctrine in the church if we are to follow the design in which Jesus intended for His church to function. Second Timothy 4:3, 4 says “for the time will come (and now is) when they will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.” When there is no union with Christ in the church entertainment becomes the norm. The love for sound doctrine becomes lost and the demand for less than the true gospel becomes prevalent. Make me feel good preacher becomes the cry in the church without any emphasis on the teaching of sound doctrine which brings about transformation in the lives of the people. “After their own lusts these professing believers will not seek pastors according to the standards of God’s Word but will seek those who conform to their own self-seeking worldly desires and fill the building. They will prefer preachers with gifts of enticing words of man’s wisdom, the ability to entertain, and messages that reassure them that they can remain a Christian while continuing to live ungodly lives. The church will not thrive and be successful without the teaching/preaching of sound doctrine. God’s Word must be our ultimate guide to truth and practice in the church. Next, we must see that when our focus is on a building we neglect to establish a vertical relationship with God, which will prevent us from horizontally nourishing a warm, honest, open, healing fellowship based upon a common life together in Christ. God intended for the church to be a place where His love would be displayed to the lost world through fellowship among brethren. We can’t have a private church that is not open to sharing the love of God with others. Lastly, prayer has to be a high priority and an integral part of our life together as a body of believers. In Acts, where there is much prayer, there is much activity of the Holy Spirit; and where there is much activity of the Holy Spirit there is much prayer. Today one of the most neglected activities in the church is corporate prayer. We have lost the importance of prayer in our lives. Prayer is our line of open communication with God that must be established in the life of a believer. It is here that we grow in our relationship with God, and yet, prayer has become the one thing that believers are quick to neglect. Therefore, if private prayer is neglected, then its’ no wonder we see the decline in attendance when the body of believers have set a time to pray corporately. Corporate prayer builds unity among a body of believers.

To determine whether a church is following the design laid out in scripture, there are three questions to ask:

1. Do they believe God’s Word is infallible and inerrant?
2. Is the church discipling her people? (disciple = a learner, one following the teachings of Christ)
3. Does this fellowship have some kind of missionary or evangelistic program?

Following the design of His church laid out in scripture will show that in relationship to God the church’s purpose is to worship God. Worship in the church is not merely a preparation for something else: it is in itself fulfilling the major purpose of the church with the reference to its Lord. A strong church will have effective ministries in all three of these areas.

The true church is not contained within the walls of a building, but in the heart of men.