Article printed from “What Christians Want To Know:”  
**http://www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com/how-to-choose-a-church-7-things-to-look-for/**

The Bible clearly shows us that the “church” is not a structure or building but rather a body of believers.  Hebrews 10:25 says, “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another.”  This Bible verse emphasizes the fact that followers of Jesus must regularly meet together.  The local church is typically where this type of meeting will occur.  So the church (body of believers) is very important to the life of a Christian.  Choosing a church is one of the most important decisions that you can make in your life, maybe only second behind choosing a spouse to marry. Your church, in many ways, helps to shape who you are and your relationship with God. Many of the things you will learn about the Bible will come through your church. This decision is not one to make flippantly or without putting much thought into it.  The choice is important and the options are many.  Some recent statistics show that there are approximately 450,000 churches in the United States of America.  Even in a small town one will often have six or seven choices within a few minutes of home.  So where do we begin?  How do I choose?

I am going to go through some things that are important about picking a church.  These will include things to look for and also things to avoid.  However, keep in mind that our number one resource for every decision in life is to turn to God and the leading of the Holy Spirit for any decision that we will make in life.  I encourage you to pray and to look to God for wisdom and leading in this all-important choice.

**1. The Authority and Inerrancy of the Bible**

This means that all the words in Scripture are God’s words and if we are to disobey them, we are disobeying God.  Ask these questions…

Is the Bible the main resource for preaching and teaching in the church?

Does the church believe that the Bible is the inspired and inerrant word of God and is the final authority on every church matter?

**2. A Place That Encourages You in Worship**

Every church should encourage you to worship God.

This point almost seems too obvious to mention.  The church is about worship to God the Father.  That is what we exist for.  He created us to worship Him.  Jesus makes this point very clear when He is asked by the Pharisees which commandment is the greatest.  Jesus says (Matthew 22:37 & 39), “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind…Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Worship isn’t just about sitting through a worship service or singing songs.  At the core of worship is an intimate communication with God.  The church must help you in this connection with God not only with the weekly Sunday Service but throughout your life.

**3. A Place That Encourages and Equips You to Grow in Discipleship**

A disciple is one who is learning to live like Christ.

A healthy church is just as concerned with growing members as with growing numbers.  Growth is a sign of life in a church. The writer of Hebrews stresses the importance of growth (discipleship).  He says in Hebrews 5:12-13, “by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!  Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness.”  These are strong words addressing the fact that this group of believers was not growing but remained as spiritual “infants.”

God is glorified by growing churches.  That growth does not just mean numerically but through people growing as evidenced in serving, or by getting involved in missions, or by giving financially (maybe for the first time), by sharing the gospel with others . . . and the list goes on and on.

**4. A Place With Sound Doctrine**

We all need to be very careful what we teach others when it comes to salvation.  There are many doctrines floating around out there. According to scripture, there’s just one faith: “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, *one faith*, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” Ephesians 4:4-6

Sound doctrine is important.  Most churches will have a doctrinal statement posted on their website.  Carefully look over this and see if it agrees with Scripture and hopefully what you believe too.  A good doctrinal statement will explain their positions on at least these topics; the Trinity (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit), salvation, sin, human destiny, the Bible, and the church.

**5. A Place Where You Can Experience Christian Fellowship**

True Christian fellowship is not just pot-luck meals and times of social gatherings. These types of fun events can often lead to fellowship, but don’t underestimate the importance of fellowship. Consider these two verses.

**Hebrews 10:24**: *And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds*.

**1 Peter 4:10**:  *Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms*.

While Jesus was walking on this planet he also showed the importance of fellowship.  He invested his life into the twelve disciples and when He sent them out, He sent them out in twos.  We need encouragement, support, correction, and guidance from other believers for us to grow the way God wants us to grow.

**6. Expositional Preaching**

This type of preaching believes in our earlier point of the authority of Scripture.  This is the oldest preaching style around but it never goes out of style.  The goal of this preaching is to expound on what is said in a particular passage of Scripture, carefully explain the meaning, and apply it to the congregation.

The expositional preacher’s authority begins and ends with Scripture.  Sound expositional preaching is often the catalyst of growth in a church.  Pray for your pastor that he will commit himself to the study of Scripture, carefully and earnestly, and that God will lead him in applying the message of the text to his own life first and then to the body of the church.

We can see this element clearly in the beginning of the Reformation.  Martin Luther was earnestly seeking to understand Scripture, and what he was hearing taught and preached did not match up to the words that he was reading in the Scripture.  We too, must be committed to be men and women of the Word of God.

**7. Evangelism**

This topic may be covered at least partially under the category of doctrine, but I believe it is so important that it needs special mention.  The view that a church takes about evangelism and salvation is so important.  A simple definition of evangelism is to present the good news of Jesus freely, and then trusting God to “convert” people (see Acts 16:14).

One of the primary callings of the church is to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ so that those who believe it already might be encouraged, and so that those who don’t believe might have a chance to do so. Every single Christian church should preach the gospel regularly and faithfully.

There are actually some churches that do not preach the good news of salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus because they don’t actually believe this. They have replaced this gospel with another, perhaps “God loves and accepts everyone, period” or something like that.  Today’s culture wants religious tolerance where all views are okay, but that is not what the Bible teaches.  We must always show love to people and not be judgmental, but there is only one way to God.  John 14:6 says, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

This is not an exhaustive list, but 7 things that I believe should be considered when choosing a church.  I once had a great seminary professor that warned us young pastors-in-training: he said, “Don’t look for a perfect church.  Because if it is, it won’t be after you get there.”  We all laughed, but he was so right.  There is no perfect church, but there are some things that are so important in finding the right one for you.

—Daryl Evans