

What God Looks for in a Local Church

When talking about a local church many will mention its “worship music”, or youth group, or dynamic preacher that leaves them inspired. Some will highlight the liturgy that emits holy feelings, or how their needs are met, or that they feel happy there. Others will focus on friendly care for the hurting or big numbers showing successful growth or gospel mission outreach. In the Corinthian church you will see 9 characteristics the Lord Jesus commissioned Paul to teach. These please the heart of God in His house.

1 – UNITY 1Cor. 1:10-16 – *“perfectly joined together in the same mind and the same judgment”*

The unity the Lord is talking about is not just the absence of fighting or agreeing to disagree. It’s not just a unity of purpose – all sharing a common goal like fans do for their ball team. It’s unanimity: all speaking the same thing with the same mind by having the same thinking in discerning right and wrong. It’s a unity of truth! This can only come by owning the Name (authority and wisdom) of the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

2 – GLORY 1Cor. 1:29 - 4:21 - *“That no flesh should glory in his presence”*

The church is to glory only in the Lord. As condemned sinners we by grace alone have been given (not earned) every spiritual blessing. So since all was given to us by grace there is no reason to “*glory in men*”. The Lord censures identifying our ‘Christianity’ by a man’s name - or - giving special titles to a man based on his gift or calling. Clerical vestments for the “ordained” that marks one out as more educated than other brothers and sisters are found not in NT Scripture. This would give a measure of glory to man. All believers are equally called “*brethren*” in Corinthians, matching the teaching of the Lord Jesus when on earth, (Matt. 23:6-12). The only one who gets a title is Jesus: the **Lord** Jesus. Things like a clapping ovation for man’s “performance” in the church would be strange when the Lord says, “*He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord*”.

3 – PURITY (HOLY) 1Cor. 5 - 6 - *“put away from among yourselves that wicked person”*

A major characteristic of God’s house is holiness. We tend to focus on happiness. “*Holiness becometh thine house, O LORD, forever*” says the OT. And the NT says, “*for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are*”. Holiness is a separation from sin and consecration to what is right. That’s why a “*brother*” living in certain sins is to be dealt with by excommunication, not toleration. That is not “shooting your wounded” but removing a cancer so health can be restored. Also, joining our body in an immoral sexual union is to be fled from for we are the Lord’s temple and His *Holy* Spirit lives in us.

4 – FIDELITY 1Cor. 7 - *“remain unmarried, or be reconciled - let not the husband put away his wife”*

Faithfulness in the marriage union until death is to characterize a man and a woman in God’s house. The Corinthian letter to His church instructs a believing woman not to depart from her husband. But if she does separate (perhaps for some safety reason, etc.) from her husband, she is to remain unmarried or seek to be reconciled says the Lord Jesus. Only her husband’s death frees her to remarry, (1 Cor. 7:39). And the believing husband (though he has marital authority) is commanded by the Lord not to put away (divorce) his wife. For the husband as head is to mirror Christ and the church. Will Christ the Head ever put away His church from His body because of our failure?

5 – CHARITY (LOVE) 1Cor. 8 - 10, 13 - *“charity [love] edifieth”*

Charity of course means to give. Charity or love is more than words but the giving of self for the welfare of others. Charity in matters of liberty is willing to give up personal freedoms before the Lord when it might offend another person’s conscience in his walk before the Lord. Charity will foster edifying over dividing. Paul said, *“if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth ...”*. The Lord taught, *“By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if ye have love one to another”*.

6 – AUTHORITY 1Cor.11:1-16 - *“the head of every man is Christ – the head of the woman is the man”*

Based on creative choice, the Lord has established man as the authority over the woman. This will demonstrate itself among the churches of God with the woman being covered and the man uncovered when praying or prophesying. Also to show God’s choice, the man is to have vocal responsibility in the churches while the woman is to be silent there. Submission is not stating inequality in value for *“the head of Christ is God”*. However, the man is not without a head for his head is Christ. Therefore, whatever man does in relation to the woman needs to come from Christ and not his own personal desires.

7 – MEMORABLY 1Cor. 11:17-34 - *“this do in remembrance of me”*

The Corinthians had turned the *“Lord’s supper”* into their *“own supper”*. What was meant to focus on the Lord in the church was abused and turned into meeting their social needs. They are reminded when they come together in the church that a primary purpose is the remembrance of the Lord. The Lord’s Supper is a continual object lesson to show forth the Lord Jesus Christ’s great redeeming death till He comes. It is a time of mutual fellowship in Christ when thanksgiving is offered as the Lord did. In a memorial service one in love focuses on the person who died, not his or her own personal needs.

8 – PLURALITY 1Cor. 12 & 14 - *“ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn”*

Because the Spirit gives all believers various gifts, there is to be the liberty of a plurality of brothers involved in a church meeting. This will provide a varied and full spiritual diet to help the believers learn and be comforted. It will also help keep the brothers in the Word as they (not just one professional man) have some responsibility in contributing to the growth of the church. It’s not just sitting in the “pew” to take in. However, this liberty of gifts is an orderly plurality controlled by the Lord’s written commandments for His churches to promote learning and His headship protocol.

9 – VERACITY (TRUTH) 1Cor. 15 - *“I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received”*

While charity (love) is a key characteristic, we learn that charity *“rejoiceth in the truth”*. Truth gives the right understanding of God. Truth sets free from satanic deceptions to entice one away from the Lord’s ways. So in chapter 15 the Spirit guides Paul to correct the doctrinal error that the resurrection is past. He does not keep silent so as not to offend. But he reveals truth to encourage the church as *“the pillar and ground of the truth”* in a dark world. He did not use opinion or popular consensus but the Word from the Lord.

Notice this all starts with the unanimity of chapter one of having the same mind in God’s wisdom – *“the mind of Christ”*. If this is off, the rest will be harder to reach. Are we seeking a church with these characteristics and helping such with our involvement?