

Preacher's Pen points

Church “shopping”



This past week's newspaper carried an interesting article about “finding a house of faith that fits”. The article, describing a local family that visited numerous churches before deciding to join a Baptist congregation, focused on a trend among religious people of “church shopping” before picking a place of worship. A related article offered some practical suggestions about how to decide which church to join. Both articles prompted me to think about the criteria by which people in our society choose congregations.

What Are People Looking For in a Church?

It seems quite clear that not everyone is looking for the same thing in a congregation. I fear that too many people are looking for something akin to a poor man's country club or a one-stop service center for family life—a church that will feed you, provide day care, offer recreational activities and an entertaining Sunday morning service. And there are many churches willing to accommodate the wishes of the masses in order to keep the pews filled. However, by what authority would a church professing faith in Christ and divine ownership seek to provide all kinds of social amenities?

The Features of NT Congregations

A careful study of the church established by the apostles of Christ reveals no such inclination. Instead we see a commitment to spiritual edification and the preservation of life so that brothers and sisters might continue a spiritual relationship with God and one another. Consequently, the NT church assembled for worship, engaging in heartfelt prayers and remembrance of Jesus in the breaking of bread. They were devoting themselves to the apostle's teaching and the spiritual

fellowship that results from obeying Him (Ac. 2:42). NT churches had weekly collections to support the work of teaching the gospel and helping the needy among them (1 Cor. 16:1-2). Elders were appointed to lead and deacons were appointed to serve in carrying out the church's mission (Phil. 1:1). Members were encouraged to be “ready for every good deed” and to glorify God through their example and through the proclamation of the word to others (Tit. 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:9).

A Church That Fits Whom?

Regrettably it appears that the criteria for deciding what church to become a member of often focuses more on how the congregation “fits” the prospective member rather than how the congregation “fits” the NT. Ultimately, the church's goal should never be to fashion itself according to the perceived needs or viewpoints of its visitors, but rather to fashion itself according to the authorized wishes of the ever-present Christ. A church that makes life easier for people to manage this life may be popular; but such a congregation will by these efforts sow the seeds of its own demise. The people-power and resources needed to achieve these ends will diminish the efforts and financing for the spiritual teaching and growth which God seeks from His church.

What Perry Heights offers!

I have no doubt that many visitors who come among us may go away disappointed, not finding what they were looking for! However, I would hope that every person seeking God and a life with Him based on His word will find this church to be not only what the Lord seeks but also just what they need, and that their “church shopping” will come to an end right here. —Johnny Felker