

What makes a “church” a church?

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🕒 What is the Church?

While there are certainly many ways to define or describe the church in a manner that is consistent with biblical truth, I want to borrow [with one slight modification] the following definition from Wayne Grudem’s book *Systematic Theology*:

“The Church is the community of all true believers [in the one true God] for all time.”

Matthew 16:18

“...I will build my church...”

Jesus has one Church, yet many churches.

This singular, “Capital-C” Church exists as a group of smaller, local churches. We can see this clearly in the book of Galatians.

Galatians 1:13

For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it.

Galatians 1:2-3

...To the churches of Galatia: grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ...

🕒 What makes a “church” a church?

Is a church a true church simply because it *calls* itself a church? NO.

Revelation 2:9

I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

A church is a church as long as Jesus considers it a church! And Jesus, though very patient with us, is always ready and willing to remove churches from his list.

Revelation 1:20

As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

Revelation 2:5

Remember therefore from where you have fallen. repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place...

How can we recognize a false church?

Any “church” that preaches a false gospel is a false church.

Galatians 1:9

As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

1 Corinthians 15:3-11

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve...so we preach and so you believed.”

Galatians 5:4

You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.”

-Paul, the apostle-

How can we recognize a true church?

Throughout history, many people have attempted to describe the “marks” of a true church. Here are a couple of examples:

“Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ’s institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists.”

-John Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion-

“A true church is one characterized by:

- *Regenerated church membership*
- *Qualified leadership*
- *Preaching and worship*
- *Rightly administered sacraments*
- *Spirit unity*
- *Holiness*
- *The Great Commandment to love*
- *The Great Commission to evangelize and make disciples.”*

-Mark Driscoll & Gerry Breshears: Vintage Church-

In reality, it is often very difficult to measure a church's faithfulness to Jesus. It is even *more* difficult to predict the exact point at which Jesus' patience for that church will run out. It makes sense, then, to measure the relative "health" of a church.

🎧 **What makes a church a "healthy" church?**

Book recommendations: *9 Marks of a Healthy Church* by Mark Dever.
What is a Healthy Church? by Mark Dever.

✅ **Biblically qualified church leadership with biblical church government.**

Under Jesus' leadership, and the authority of the Scriptures, the welfare and faithfulness of the church is encouraged by the joint ministry of the elders, deacons, and the congregation itself--each invested with a measure of authority.

The Elders.

Elders are recognized according to biblical criteria (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Once recognized and tested in both life and doctrine, they are appointed to service by other elders, and they have the final say in the affairs of the local church which they help to lead, because they, more than anyone else, will give an account to God for the final state of their church (Hebrews 13:17).

The Deacons.

Deacons also are recognized according to biblical criteria (1 Timothy 3:8-12). They can be nominated by the congregation (which includes the elders, who may or may not be involved in their nomination). Like elders, deacons must also be tested in both life and doctrine and, once approved by the elders, they are appointed to their service as deacons, invested with only as much authority as the elders have given to them.

The Congregation.

The Scriptures teach us that the congregation is entrusted with a very important role in the church's government:

2 Corinthians 2:5-7

Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it...to all of you. For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him...

Notice that it was *the majority* which enforced the disciplinary action taken against the member who had caused everyone else pain. Therefore, even if the final decision to excommunicate this member was made by the elders (which it should be), it was enforced by the congregation. The Congregation, then, has been entrusted with the authority to enforce the decisions of the elders in matters of church discipline, whether in cases of excommunication *from* fellowship or restoration *to* fellowship.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What are some of the things that you would consider “marks” of a healthy church?
2. In your opinion, how do you contribute to the overall health of your church?