

Marks of a Good Church

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 07 June 2009

[0 : 00] 1 Timothy 3.15 Paul writes to Timothy, he says, But if I tarry long that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

2 Timothy 3.15 Paul describes the church as the house or the family of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

Now the church isn't just some kind of social club. It's not just some kind of cozy little comfortable group of people who get together because they like the social aspects or they want to just get out of the house and get some fresh air.

Or just have a bit of a time of activity together. It's the church of the living God. It's an organism. It's a bringing together of God's people, knitting together as a family of God.

And there's some features of the church of God that stand out. There's many we could list. We're just touching on a few today. How will we recognize the church? The church, the real church, the church of God, the church of the living God.

[1 : 22] There's many features that it will have. So these are some that we could list. Firstly, we see in this verse that it's marked by the truth. The church of the living God is the pillar and ground of the truth.

We know that there's many churches, there's many gathering places, there's many fellowships, there's many gatherings and assemblies of people.

And sometimes those gatherings are not founded and based on the truth. The truth has to be fundamental. It has to be the foundation. It has to be that which we build upon. The Word of God must be the foundation.

That foundation who is Jesus Christ is the cornerstone. And we need the love for the truth.

Ephesians 4 verse 14 tells us that there's going to be a time when there's a lot of tossing to and fro with winds of doctrine.

And the slight of men or the crafty acts of men and the cunning craftiness and deception. It says, Ephesians 4 verse 14, That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the slight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.

[2 : 35] But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ. Christ is the one we ought to grow up into him.

And we need to be aware of these false winds of doctrine, of various teachings that can carry people about, cause confusion and ignorance when it's going away from the Word of God.

We need to be careful. Proverbs 23, it says, That we should buy the truth and sell it not. Also wisdom and instruction and understanding.

Now there's people that are searching for churches and they might come and go. This has happened and happens all the time. They're looking for something, whether it's a little bit of excitement or razzmatazz or something that's light and fluffy or warm and breezy or nice tingly and emotional.

Or whether it's something that tickles the ears and the preacher scratches them where they itch.

But the Word of God talks about the truth. It's got to be the truth that we found it upon.

[3 : 48] Now it saddens me when I hear some people moving from this church into a church that is astray from the Word of God. If you're going to leave this church, let me give you a list of churches I'd recommend.

All right? Rather than you go down to a church that's wishy-washy and ecumenical, part of the World Council of Churches, where they're carrying on all kinds of garbage. And whether it be opening the door, like if you open the door to the Hillsong, for example, it's the thin end of the wedge.

You just as well put AOG over the top of your door. If you're going to have Hillsong in your church, it's going to become charismatic, Pentecostal. You're going to end up with the laughing revivals and the people frothing at the mouth, kicking and screaming and rolling on the floor.

People, you've got to watch out. And we based and found it on truth. The Word of God is what we're doing, biblical and sound. Now, that's not to say there's some lovely people who are Pentecostals who love the Lord and are safe people.

But there's a lot of deception and ignorance and false teachings and false practices, which are just, they're not in here. Slaying in the Spirit is not in the Word of God. So it's just not on.

[5 : 08] It's just not right. And likewise, the ecumenical movement, people following, effectively, if you're in an ecumenical church, which is a church that is a member of the World Council of Churches or allied to those kind of things, then you're virtually following the Pope of Rome.

And all of the garbage that the World Council of Churches have, where they have a mishmash and a total mixture, it's not founded upon the truth. And that's the danger.

That's the great danger. And it would be remiss of me not to warn you of that and not to be clear and sound and clear about that. And the truth of God needs to be the foundation on which we build, on which we fellowship.

And sometimes that means saying it like it is. It's like 2 Corinthians 5.11. Paul said, Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.

There's a terror of the Lord. There's a sense where we need to be fearful of Him, of displeasing Him, of dishonouring Him, of getting astray from the truth and erring from the truth.

[6 : 15] And because we love the Lord, we love the truth, we want to declare it soundly and loudly and as faithfully as we can. And especially the soul-saving truth.

Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men. We want to persuade people to trust Christ. That's what we endeavour to do through the youth group that met last night, meets fortnightly, through the Sunday school with the children, through our activities, reaching women or men, or outreach of practical kinds when we have meals together, there's folk that are interested in running a bit of a community meal on occasion.

All of these things are geared and designed really to be open doors that we can invite people and then we can talk to them and communicate the gospel that we can persuade men because we know the terror of the Lord.

We know there's a reality of hell and we know there's dangers there. Someone was talking with me in the week about Freemasonry. There's some churches that think it's okay, to be part of the Masonic Lodge and they've got people in positions of power who are Freemasons, who are in leadership of churches or even membership of churches, who are part of a secret society that when you examine and scrutinise it, at the nth degree, it's actually worshipping Lucifer.

We don't have a bar of that. If you're at all connected with the Masonic Lodge or Freemasonry, you need help. You need to get out of that movement because it's full of darkness and demonic and you need Christ to save your soul.

[7 : 56] We need to declare the truth and the church of God should be marked by truth. Here's a quote from a man called George Barner. He said, The church is designed to be a teaching centre.

Christians don't act like Christians because they don't think like Christians. Christians don't think like Christians because they don't understand their faith. When we don't understand the faith, when we don't understand the Word of God, when we don't understand biblical truth, it's going to affect our walk, it's going to affect our thinking, it's going to affect our life.

And a great church, a sound Bible-believing church, is a Bible-teaching church. It's where we love the Bible, we love the truth of God's Word. As the preacher John MacArthur said, Novelty is not necessary.

Regular, consistent teaching of biblical truth is what every Christian needs. Every Christian needs biblical truth to be ingrained in it, to be founded in it.

Come to the Wednesday night Bible study. Get founded in the Word. Get grafted in the Word. Let the Word of God take and work within your soul.

[9 : 05] Let it impact you. Let it dwell within you richly. And if we understand the faith, our believing will affect our behaving. Now, there's a story told, obviously quite tongue-in-cheek, but once the devil was walking along, with one of his cohorts, one of his demons, and they saw a man ahead of them, and he was picking up something shiny, and the demon said to the devil, What did he find?

The devil said, A piece of the truth. Doesn't it bother you that he found a piece of the truth? No, said the devil. I will see to it that he makes a religion out of it.

That's what religion is. Sometimes there's a piece of the truth there. You could find some truth in Buddhism, if you looked hard enough. You could find some truth in Freemasonry, maybe.

You could find some truth in Mormonism. You could find some truth in the Jehovah's Witness teaching. A piece of the truth, yes. But not the whole truth.

And we need to declare the whole truth, the sound declaration of the whole counsel of God, the sound declaration of the whole Word of God. I mean, Joseph Smith, he had an element of truth.

[10:29] Maybe he did see an angel. But certainly what he was told is not the Gospel. And the Bible says, If an angel comes and says something that's not in here, don't believe it.

Don't have a bar of it. So even though not be an element of truth, there's some lovely people that are Mormons, but they don't know the Saviour. They don't know the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Master and the Almighty God in human flesh.

They don't know Him. And they're missing the whole point. So don't just settle for an element of truth, a piece of the truth. Want the whole truth, the whole truth of God. And so the work of God, the church of God, should be marked by the truth.

Another thing is that the church of God should be marked by love. Should be marked by love.

Ephesians 5, verse 25, it's talking to husbands there.

Ephesians 5, verse 25, it says, Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it.

[11:41] People today, the Lord Jesus Christ loves the church. He loved the church and He gave Himself for it. That was the extremity of love, wasn't it? That was the absolute extent of love that He gave Himself for it.

Consider the great value of the church. The church is very precious. It's priceless to Him. He loves it. It's His. He's bought it. He's the Saviour of it. He died for it.

He bought it. He built it. He heads it. He is the head of the church. It's not the Pope of Rome or the Queen of England. It's the Lord Jesus Christ is the head of the church.

Our head, our master, our leader, our guide and sovereign. And His church is marked by love. His great love to us. And not only is it marked by His love, His redeeming love that's purchased us, but the church of God, you as His family, as God's people, as you as my brothers and sisters in Christ, we should be marked by love too.

We should love the brethren. There should be a brotherly love for one another. It says in 1 Peter 1 verse 22, seeing that you've purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned or not hypocritical love of the brethren.

[13:00] In other words, genuine love. It's not a fake kind of love, but the real thing, real love. See that you love one another with a pure heart, fervently.

That's the kind of love that we should have. A love that's fervent, that's alive, that's meaningful, joyful love, earnest love, fervent love.

That's a mark of the church that it should have love. And 1 John 3 verse 14, John writes, he says, But we know that we pass from death unto life because we love the brethren.

And 1 Peter 3 again, verse 8, Finally, be all of one mind, having compassion, one of another, love as brethren. Love as brethren. That's what God's church should be marked by, love, that we care, that we love one another.

And by God's help and grace, I trust that we have that, that we do take time to care, that we take time to bother about people and put ourselves out where we can and go the second mile and have that self-sacrificing love that the Lord Jesus had.

[14:12] That love that was undeserved love, wasn't it? His absolute love. It's been said of love, love ever gives, forgives, outlives, and ever stands with open hands.

And while it lives, it gives. For this is love's prerogative, to give and give and give. Loving is giving. It's giving to one another.

It's giving time. It's giving our consideration, our compassion, our care. And it's looking out for one another. It says in Philippians how we shouldn't just be concerned with our own interests, but we should look out for the interests of others.

And the church of God should be marked by love. Another thing that the church should be marked by is joy. Joy. In Psalm 122 verse 1, it says that the psalmist cried, I was glad when they said unto

me, let us go into the house of the Lord.

We can be glad that every opportunity that we can make to fellowship, to worship. In Psalm 40 verse 16, it says, Let all those that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee.

[15 : 25] Let such as love thy salvation say continually, the Lord be magnified. You know, isn't it great to worship? Isn't it great just to turn our thoughts off the world and the cares and the considerations of the world and just to put our mind on things above.

To set our thoughts on things above. To have that thought of heaven, of our saviour. You know, we all are busy in different ways. I know the son slaving over the school books and doing their homework and whether it's assignments or whether it's the cares of caring for family or work life or whatever might be occupying your energies at this time.

It's good just to, as the Lord Jesus says, to come aside. Come aside and rest a while. Come aside and be refreshed and have that time of fellowship, of glad worship.

And it's one of our privileges, isn't it? To worship, to rejoice together and enjoy the blessings that God gives to us from fellowship that we can have this moment. It's just a moment in our week really, isn't it?

That moment that we put aside to draw closer to the Lord, to get energised, to get challenged. And joy is one of the marks of the church. And it's been said of joy that it's a by-product of obedience.

[16 : 51] We find joy in following Him. The true joy is in following the Saviour, in walking in His truth and living the life He wants us to live. Another mark of the church is the church is marked by fruit.

Marked by fruit. In John 15, 8, the Lord Jesus spoke to His disciples and He said, Herein is my Father glorified that you bear much fruit.

So shall you be in my disciples. God wants you, brother, sister, He wants you to be fruitful. He wants you to bear fruit, to be fruitful. Now we know the Word of God talks about the fruit of the Spirit.

Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, all these beautiful things that can flow out of our lives that as we might be like a fruit tree that people come and, you know, they come and grab a little piece of fruit. Oh, you taste good. Yeah, there's that love and, oh, here's some joy. Here's some long-suffering from this one. You know, here's some fruitfulness.

[17 : 57] Fruitfulness of all those different kinds. Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, temperance, self-control, all those things that we should have as believers. It should be flowing out of our lives and people should want to pick that fruit.

They should want to come and taste that fruit of Christ, that fruit of the Spirit that's flowing out of your life. And James 3, 17, it says, that wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, then gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits.

It goes on, the fruit of righteousness which is sown in peace of them that make peace. God wants you to be full of fruit, the fruit of righteousness, the fruit of the Spirit. Every Christian, the Lord Jesus says, I want you to bear much fruit, so shall you be my disciples.

Whether it's the fruit of good works, the fruit of your character, of your Christ-like nature. Titus 3, 14, it says that we should maintain good works that we be not unfruitful.

And 2 Peter 1, in the context there, talks about the different qualities that Peter says that we should add to our faith, the different qualities that we can have in our life of Christian character. And he says, verse 8 of 2 Peter 1, For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that you shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[19 : 25] How can you be more fruitful? How can you have that abounding that fruitfulness in your life? I think as we worship, as we fellowship, that will help you to be more fruitful.

As we worship God, as we seek His face, as we hunger and thirst after righteousness, to want to grow, to want to develop spiritually, to want to be that good example to others, to hold fast our profession, to put the kingdom of God first, to consider one another, our brothers and sisters, to be found ready, waiting, watching, working, worshipping.

It's a great investment of your time to worship Him, to spend that energy, that effort in worship. It's something that, there's a fruit of our lips, isn't there?

Giving thanks to His name, the sacrifice of praise. There's a fruitfulness that comes as we worship, as we grow to know God more, as we draw near to Him and we receive His strength.

Another mark of the church of God, of the living, church of the living God, is participation too. In Ephesians 4.16 it says, the effectual working, or in other words, the word energy there is the Greek

word that we get our word energy from, the effectual working in the measure of every part maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

[20 : 54] There's that word love again, the building up of ourselves in love. As every part does its work, it says, as every part has that effectual working or that energy, that activating, that energising of every part, as every part plays its part, there's an increase, there's a growing of the body.

And church is a community, it's a knitting together in love, as we're told elsewhere, that we're brought together as God's family. And it says, the word of God encourages us to fellowship. Now I'm preaching to the converter this morning, but I'll have to give the DVD to those that aren't here today. But John Wesley said, there is nothing more unchristian than a solitary Christian. You can't be an effective, fruitful Christian if you're a solitary Christian. You need to be a part of the body, join it together, be joined together, whether it be with one or two, wherever two or three are gathered.

Get some fellowship, whether it's in your home, whether it's in your workplace, or wherever you spend your time, your neighbours, the godly friends and Christians that you know.

[22 : 02] Get together and fellowship. It doesn't necessarily be under the spire of a cathedral that you fellowship, but as you come together with your brothers and sisters as you fellowship, it'll help us to grow.

And it's been said, Christians are like coals of fire. Together they glow, apart they grow cold. And we need that fellowship to help you keep warm spiritually.

And you are needed. Every one of you is needed. Every one of you. Now, I prepared the roster today and everybody that was on the roster to do something today is not here.

Amen. Now, apart from Joshua and Sophia who looked after the door, thanks for that. But it's helpful if you're on the roster, try to be here. Now, of course, they've all got good rings and they're not well, so we won't condemn them today.

But I'd like the church to be a place where you can take part. You can participate. Where it's not a one-man band, where it's everybody joining together. As you've got gifts and callings and abilities and energy and activity that, you know, we've got different folk folk running after the library there with lots of materials to share.

[23 : 13] Thanks to Audrey for that. And we've got folk that pass out the hymn books that welcome people that help people get a seat. People that drive buses. You know, one of our bus drivers was sick today too.

So, we have a bit of a more constraint on us today. But people are ministering in different ways. There's a lady that runs a ladies fellowship. There's folk that are helping run the prayer meeting that run the men's fellowship.

there's different people involved and active and taking part. That's what we'd like to be. We want to be a church where there's participation. You know, Paul says, when you come, have something to share.

Have something to bring when you come into the fellowship time. And we want to encourage that. There's practical things too, like helping tidy up or pass out some refreshments after the service.

Little things, but every little part makes a difference and helps people running the songs here and helping with the filming. It's all important. It's all important. Even just the fellowshiping afterwards.

[24 : 14] You know, when we say, right, you can go home, you don't just dart for the door. Come and shake someone's hand and say hello. Give them a warm greeting. You know, it says, greet one another with a holy kiss.

You know, of course, in our custom and our culture, it's a good handshake and maybe a little hug or something. You know, give someone that warmth, that welcome.

That's what we want to be a church where there's a participation and it could be just that welcoming of people at the close or the beginning and praying for one another. Maybe there's someone here who's got a need that we can just spend that moment and just spend that moment to care, to participate, to share.

You know, there's an old Aesop's fable that goes that one day it occurred to some of the members of the body that they were doing all the work and that the belly was having all the food.

So they held a meeting and after a long discussion they decided to strike until the belly consented to take its proper share of the work. So for a day or two the hands refused to take the food, the mouth refused to receive it and the teeth had no work to do.

[25 : 26] But after a day or two members began to find that they themselves were not in a very active condition. The hands could hardly move, the mouth was all parched and dry, the legs were unable to support the rest and thus they found that even the belly in its dull quiet way was doing necessary work for the body that all must work together or the body would go to pieces and it's true too as we know in 1 Corinthians that Paul spoke about the body of Christ saying that the eye can't see it doesn't need the nose or the ear doesn't need the toe or whatever.

Every part we need one another we need one another brothers and sisters and the body the church is marked by participation when every part has got that effectual working that energising of every part.

Another mark of the church is the church is marked by stirring. Now we don't have one of the stirrers here Marjorie's isn't here today but the church of God is marked by stirrers we saw it Don here the church is marked by stirring stirring or provoking in Hebrews 10 24 it says allow us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works you could say to stir one another up to provoke one another to provoke one another I think some people have been provoking this morning provoking and then stirring up waking up and then stirring up and provoking to love and to good works to stir one another up to prod one another to press one another to urge one another to incite one another that's the meaning of it it needs to spur one another on ok anybody else falling asleep this morning you know you're going to stir people and spur people on and stimulate people and encourage people that's the meaning of the word it means to sharpen people it means to motivate people to love and to good works two things that we're to stir one another provoke one another to have of course there's some stirring that might not be so godly but we want to be godly stirrers don't we brother Don amen we want to be a godly stirrer a Scottish stirrer and have that love that good works amongst ourselves the good will the love for one another that interest in one another that caring for one another and those good works we might have good works that we can encourage one another to do that which is right to do that which is good to do that which is healthy and positive and helping grow the church and grow us together in the faith and the blessings of scriptural fellowship is one of the blessings is that we can stir one another up you know maybe you can challenge people if some people need a bit of a challenge you can challenge them of course it says speak the truth in love so we can do it lovingly and with compassion and care and with the right spirit not a holier than thou or a putting someone down but I wanted to lift people up I wanted to hold their hand and lift them up help them walk with Christ and be a stirrer in a good sense and lastly another mark that I've found is that the church of God the church of the living God is marked by the glory it's marked by glory God is here it's the house of God it's the family of God God's family and one preacher put it like this he said this church was not rusted together by traditionalism not wired together by organisation not frozen together by formalism they were melted and brought together by prayer praise and the power of the Holy Spirit of God we want to be melted together we want to be moulded together and shaped together in God's image in God's way by God's life transforming power that people might be saved in our gatherings that people might trust Christ as their master as their lord and saviour as they might experience personally that life transforming power of the converting power of God almighty that can impact that can make a difference in people's lives and

Ephesians 3 21 it says unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages world without end amen unto him be glory in the church we want to be a church the church of the living God a gathering a fellowshiping an assembly of God's people marked by the truth that this is what we founded upon not opinions of men not the latest fad not to be a fad driven church or a purpose driven church we want to be a bible based church we want to be founded upon this message upon this truth upon this salvation the truth must mark us love must mark us his redeeming love our love for one another the brotherly love that cares that is concerned that joy that comes from knowing Christ salvation the joy the gladness that we find we want to spend time in fellowship that fruit that will come as we're fruitful

[30 : 50] Christians as we're growing as we're vibrant as we're alive as we're growing as we're fertile as we've got the fruit of the spirit as there's the fruit of life saved of souls won that church that's marked by participation that you'll find something to do and do it with all your might that you'll find that place of service you'll ask God to release you and give you that ministry that use that gift that talent that calling that he's put on your life that you can be a fruitful participating member that you can be stirring up one another provoking one another to love and to good works and at the end

of it's all that God will get all the glory that God will get all the praise that God will be glorified in our fellowshiping that it won't be anything us big noting ourselves that we're somehow better than anyone else or that somehow we've arrived but that we'll have that humility that says that we want God to be glorified we want to be led by his spirit we want him to be paramount and central in everything that we do that he will get the praise that he will get the glory that he will be the central focal point of everything that we do and everything that we have and everything that we do that it's not just thinking of activities for the sake of them but that everything that we do will be shaped and guided as will be led by him that he will be glorified