

Connecting With Other Christians

by Steven L. Pogue

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, part of the main. –John Donne, Meditation XVII Wouldn't it be great to know older Christians who can help you grow in your faith? Christians who listen to your doubts, who understand your problems? Who model a life of faith and dependence on God?

The moment you began your relationship with Jesus Christ you also began a relationship with other Christians. Now you are part of God's family, and in God's family there are no orphans. God did not intend for His children to live as individual islands of faith, but rather as a community of believers, interrelated with each other and part of something much bigger than themselves. That "something" is the Church.

Our English word church comes from a Greek word meaning "belonging to the Lord." The Bible explains that every Christian – every true believer in Jesus Christ – is a part of the Church even if they've never stepped inside a church building. God's universal Church (usually spelled with a capital "C") crosses denominational, cultural and national lines. The Bible refers to this union of believers as "the body of Christ."

You are family with Christians everywhere...that is the universal aspect to the Church. You are also family with believers right where you live. They are waiting to meet you – in a Christian organization on your campus or local church.

The "Perfect" Church

As a new Christian I was very critical of churches. Why weren't they doing a better job of teaching the Bible, of reaching the world for Christ? Why were there so many hypocrites? One Sunday the minister at my church spoke about the role of the church and one statement has stuck with me for years: "If you ever find a perfect church, don't join it. You'll ruin it, because you are an imperfect person." I realized that I was putting my own church and every other church under terrific scrutiny. I'm not perfect – so why should I expect my church to be perfect?

The church is God's institution. Christ established it as the earthly representative of Himself. It is inhabited by people who are still in the process of becoming mature in Christ. Some people in the churches you visit may not even be Christians, or if they are, they may have placed other priorities in life higher than Christ.

While you won't be able to find a perfect church, you should be able to find one that is right for you. At this point you may be thinking, *Great! But which church do I go to? How do I find the right church for me?* Well, here is a link to churches and other Christian organizations, and here are some questions to consider as you visit...

What does the church believe?

They probably have a printed copy of their statement of faith. Read over it, and make sure you understand it and agree with it. If you have questions about their beliefs, ask a pastor.

Does the church demonstrate love?

Christians are to be known for their love. Jesus said, "As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34,35) So how do you know if a church is demonstrating love?

Gene Getz, in *The Measure of a Church*, says that biblical love is like Christlikeness: "Biblical love involves demonstrating those attitudes and actions toward others that Christ demonstrated when He came into the world and lived among men."¹

Such love is fleshed out in forgiveness and encouragement rather than bitterness and gossip; in patience and understanding with the unlovely person. When you see love demonstrated in a church, you are seeing Christ at work.

How does the church use the Bible?

Nearly every worship service will include a time when the minister reads a Bible passage and talks about it. As you listen to the message, keep a mental or written outline. Does he teach you what the passage is about, or does he use it as a spring board for his own arguments?

As you meet church members, find out ways in which they are being equipped for ministry. Some churches do a great job of teaching their members how to study the Bible, how to counsel friends, how to care for others in need, how to share their faith. Are the members being equipped to study God's Word and live it out in service to others?

Who do the members talk about?

We all need time to talk about yesterday's ball game or how our kids are doing. It's not unspiritual to want to share a wide variety of topics with other Christians. Christians should enjoy life! But if the conversations in the church are no different than the conversations at work, something is missing. Jesus Christ is the most wonderful person in the universe. Do they honor and lift up Jesus Christ? Is there a spirit of worship, love, and devotion to Him in their gatherings? After attending a church just a few times, you can get a sense of who people are really meeting for: themselves, their pastor, an ear-tickling sermon, or a reputation. The ultimate purpose should be to glorify God.

Is the church open to partnerships with other Christian organizations?

A church which recognizes the spiritual unity of the universal Body of Christ should be willing to pray for and support other Christian ministries. Any extreme separatism or individualism is not the pattern we see among the churches in the New Testament.

Making your choice

After you've visited a number of churches and made your choice, begin to look for opportunities to get to know the other members as people. Some members may be reluctant to introduce themselves because they are fairly new to the church too. Take the initiative in getting to know people.

You will not mature in your relationship with Christ isolated in a cocoon of private Christianity. There is a vast group of people who really care for you and would like to help you make it through tough times. They form God's own "miracle of deliverance." They form the church.

¹Gene Getz, *The Measure of a Church* (Glendale, CA: Regal Books, 1975), p.33.

This article is an excerpt from Steven L. Pogue's book, *The First Year of Your Christian Life*. If you would like to purchase a copy of this book, you may do so here: www.campuscrusade.com/books.