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Characteristics of Successful Churches

Quarterly Aim: To show the true meaning of a church being successful for the Lord.

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Successful Churches Glorify God

APPLICATION

To show the importance of recognizing God, the Lord Jesus Christ in His church.

SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: Ephesians 3:21.

Related Scripture: Matthew 6:13; Romans 16:27; Galatians 1:1-5; 1 Timothy 1:17; 6:13-16; Hebrews 13:21; 1 Peter 5:10, 11; 2 Peter 3:18; Jude 25.

Devotional Reading: To Him Be Glory Forever, Romans 11:36.

Introduction

How would you describe a successful church? The most natural way is to look at the number of people who attend any given church. If a church does not have several hundred people attending it, many people will not consider going to it. But attendance is not the only mark of a successful church. Others might look at the number of programs a church has to determine whether it is successful, but programs do not necessarily mean a church is successful.

Beginning with this lesson, we will examine some qualities that make a church successful in the eyes of God. Remember, numbers can be deceiving. If we base success solely on numbers, then Jesus—the founder of the local, New Testament church—was not extremely successful. When He ascended to Heaven, He had only one hundred twenty people meeting in the upper room (Acts 1:15). Many of the qualities we will study are not areas about which many churches are concerned.

The first quality is, a successful church must glorify God. The church belongs to the Lord. Nobody should worship any man, whether that be the pastor or a deacon or anybody else in a church. That thought eliminates many churches today because they were founded on the premise of the worship of man. But, a successful church of the Lord always gives the preeminence and glory to God (Eph. 3:21).

1. _____ **Christ Is To Have the Honor and Glory**

The word *glory* has many meanings depending upon its usage. Perhaps the best and easiest meaning is “to shine a light upon someone or something.” Everything that takes place in the ministry of a church is to place Jesus in a good light. The worship service should put Jesus in a good light. The teaching in Sunday School and Baptist Training Course should put Jesus in a good light. The fellowships should put Jesus in a good light. Whatever a church does, it should present Jesus to the world in such a way that lost people would want to be saved.

Along with the glory, Christ also should be given honor (1 Tim. 1:17). The word *honor* means to give something great value or respect. The reason Jesus deserves great respect is because He is the Head of the church (Eph. 5:23). As your earthly father is the head of the home, Christ has the special place of being the Head of the church. He is in that position because He is the “saviour of the body” (Eph. 5:23) by having bought the church with His own blood (1 Cor. 6:20).

Respect is a quality that is severely lacking in society today. If we are not careful, we can carry the attitude of the world into a church and fail to give Christ the respect and honor which He deserves. We will go through the motions of worship—singing the songs, hear the message—and never really give Jesus honor for what He has done for us. It was His blood that He gave for the church; He is the Head of the church, and He deserves honor and glory.

2. _____ **Christ Is To Have the Preeminence and Glory**

A successful church not only honors Christ and gives Him glory but will also allow Christ to have the preeminence. That simply means Christ is to have first place in all that a church does. A church should never make a move without considering the desire of Christ in the matter. For instance, a church that is looking for a pastor should not be concerned with how the pastor looks, preaches or interacts with the people—although all those things are important. A church’s first concern should be which man does Christ want it to have as its pastor. It is His church; He will lead it, if it is submitted to Him, the right person.

Too many times, churches make decisions based on selfish or fleshly reasons. Church members have not submitted to the desires of the Lord but to their own fleshly nature. That was the problem with the church at Corinth, and it caused the apostle Paul to call it “carnal” (1 Cor. 3:1-3). He explained that the members often were acting like babies when they should have been growing and giving the Lord preeminence.

A carnal church is one that is not interested in what is best for the work of the Lord but is more concerned with satisfying its own selfish desires.

A church which gives the Lord preeminence is one that is submitted to Him. Paul told the Ephesians that the church is to be “subject unto Christ” as the wife is to be subject to the husband (Eph. 5:24). That is not a popular idea in marriages today, but for a marriage to work as planned by God, one has to be submissive to the other. God’s plan is for the wife to be submissive to the husband. Likewise, a church is to be submissive to Christ. He knows what is best for a church. He will guide a church through the work of His Spirit if only a church will listen and heed.

3. _____

Christ Is To Have the Recognition and Glory

Christ should have preeminence in a church because of what He has already done for it. If every member would take time in his or her life to consider what Christ did at Calvary, no one would fail to give Him the proper recognition as the Head of the church. Paul said that Christ “also loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Eph. 5:25).

The reason to give Christ the proper recognition is twofold. First, our Lord loved the church. Nobody can say he loves the church as much as Christ did. The apostle John said, “We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). That love for us was so great that He bought the church with His own precious blood (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23). Nobody in a church can say he has surrendered his life for it. There are many people who have done great works for their churches, sacrificing time and effort for the betterment of their churches. But no one can say he loved his church more than Christ. His love is the greatest reason He deserves the recognition as the Head of the church.

Second, our Lord gave Himself for the church. Those who act out of selfish interest in their church cannot say they love it as Christ did. They are not acting in selfless interest as Christ did. Christ left the splendor of Heaven—nobody else could have done that—to take on the form of a man and became obedient to the death of the cross (Phil. 2:5-8). As important as your pastor is or your deacons might be, none of them ever did that for the sake of the New Testament church. Your church leaders are important and you should love them because of the work they do, but never mistake their sacrifice for your church as being on equal footing with the sacrifice Christ made. He made the

ultimate sacrifice and deserves the proper recognition as the Head of the church.

4. _____

Christ Is To Have the Praise and Glory

When we view Christ in His proper perspective—when we understand that He deserves the honor, the glory, the preeminence and the recognition because of what He has done for His church—then it will be no problem to give Him the proper praise. It is downright robbery for a man, woman, boy or girl to fail to lift their voices in praise to the Lord when the church members gather together each week. A person who is not willing to sing praises to the Lord does not truly recognize the value of what Christ has done.

Christ wants to present to Himself a “glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing” (Eph. 5:27). A church that fails to praise the Lord for what He has done and will do is a church that is blemished by the desires of the world.

Our worship services should be exciting and filled with vigorous singing because we are praising the Lord to the best of our abilities. We do not need worship services that are cold and heartless. Such attempts at worship are truly unacceptable to the Lord. When a church comes together in full recognition of who Christ is, the worship will be Christ-honoring, and there will be a sense of excitement in the air. That kind of excitement cannot be manufactured; it can only come when a church truly understands that all glory belongs to God and no one else.

Application

Why did you come to church today? Was it because your parents made you come? Did you come out of a sense of duty? Whatever the reason, if you came for any other reason than to worship the Lord because of His greatness, you came for the wrong reason.

Each time you go to church, stop and ask yourself, “Why am I going?” You cannot control why others go, but you can surely control your reasoning. If you’ll commit to going to church to give Christ honor and glory, and really mean it, you’ll be surprised at how the church services will come alive in your heart.