

Sponsor's Guide

For Sponsors of Junior High, Young People and Adult

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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

Lesson 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.

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

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

To Him Be Glory Forever, Romans 11:36.

God deserves glory from all creation. The Lord made everything, including the institutions of the family, the government and the church. Each of these institutions may show praise to God by following the biblical plan. God's Word describes what a family should be, what human government ought to be and what a church must be. In the eternal ages to come, it is the institution of the church that will continue to give the Lord glory.

The Lord is the original cause of all things. Colossians 1:16, 17 states, "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist." He is the One who established His church. Verse 18 declares, "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence." Since Christ established His church during His personal ministry, He should get all glory and praise from it.

All things came into existence through His power. Isaiah 48:12, 13 reveals, "Hearken unto me, O Jacob and Israel, my called; I am he; I am the first, I also am the last. Mine hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned the heavens: when I call unto them, they stand up together." All glory is due God as the Creator, sustainer and supreme power of everything. All creation should give praise and glory to God for ever.

EXAMINING THE TEXT

Ephesians 3:21. Church truth makes up a significant part of the New Testament. If one gets church truth wrong, he will probably get many other things wrong. To understand the institution of the church, there are four questions that must be answered. What is a church? Who established the church? When was it established? Who prepared the material? If these questions are answered correctly, believers will be right on the subject of church truth.

What is a church? A church is a local, visible assembly of scripturally baptized believers who have been covenanted together by God for the purpose of carrying out the Great Commission. The first mention of the word *church* in the Bible is found in Matthew 16:18. When

the first two disciples were gathered together unto the Lord, the church existed in its simplest form. At that time, there was a body of at least two disciples gathered into the presence of Christ, the Head of the church. (See John 1:35-39.) The qualifications for church membership are salvation and baptism. These two disciples had been saved and baptized. This church was gathered to Jesus the Head in a local, visible body. Luke 6:17 reveals, "And he came down with them, and stood in the plain, and the company of his disciples." They went where He went. The word for *church* in the original is *ekklesia*. *Ekklesia* is a compound word meaning "out" and "to call" literally, it means the called out ones. Matthew 18:20 declares, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." When the first two saved, baptized believers were called out by Jesus and gathered unto Him, the requirements for a church were fulfilled.

Who prepared the material for the church? The first prophecy about the material being prepared is found in Isaiah 40:1-5. Luke 1:17 reveals, "And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Luke's gospel relates the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy about the material being prepared rested upon a man named John the Baptist, the son of Zacharias and Elisabeth. How did John the Baptist prepare the material for the church? Matthew 3:1, 5, 6 states, "In those days came John the Baptist, preaching . . . Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins." The church members who made up the charter members of the church had been saved under the preaching of John the Baptist. Upon their profession of faith,

they were baptized by John the Baptist. When Jesus was beginning His public ministry, He met John the Baptist and two of his disciples who had been saved and then baptized. The people were ready as prepared by John the Baptist. He pointed them to Jesus. At this point, John the Baptist had completed his work as the forerunner of Jesus.

Who established the church? Jesus spoke of His church when He said, "I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18). One must decide whether Jesus did what He said or not. Did Jesus build His church? He called out the first two, and then others. He gathered them unto Himself. He organized His church by selecting the twelve apostles, explaining the equality of church members and by giving them the authority to baptize and to fulfill His command concerning the Lord's Supper. (See 1 Corinthians 12:28; Luke 6:13-17.) He taught them His doctrine. He commissioned His church to do His work. He led them, preached to them and sent them forth on the limited commission. He gave them His Great Commission personally. He did not leave the work of building His church to any other. Although many men have established religious organizations, there is only one kind of New Testament church by the biblical pattern and only one founder, the Lord Jesus Christ.

When was the church established? Since Jesus established His church, He did it during His personal ministry. The Bible gives proof the church was established during the personal ministry of Jesus Christ on earth. First Corinthians 12:28 states, "And God hath set some in the church, first apostles." Jesus selected His apostles. (See Matthew 10:1-4.) Hebrews 2:12 states, "Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee." Jesus and His church sang at the institution of the Lord's Supper on the night He was betrayed and arrested.

Matthew 26:30 declares, "And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives." After His resurrection, Jesus met His church in Galilee and gave them His authority for the work of the Great Commission. (See Matthew 28:16-20.) The church was established during the personal ministry of Jesus. After this work was done, He ascended to Heaven.

With these things understood, we can now approach the great truth "glory in the church." The church Jesus built had always been in the plan of God. Acts 15:18 reveals, "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." God had the plan for the church from the beginning. God loved the church even before He revealed it to the world. Ephesians 5:25 states, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." God's church is not an afterthought. His great love is for blood bought churches built according to the pattern of the church Jesus built. From this one of a kind organization, God determined to receive glory. Glory is dignity, honor, praise and worship. True worship in a New Testament church gives God the honor and praise He deserves. No other organization has the capacity to give God the glory. God specified He would get glory from His churches.

Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus concerning glory in the church "by Christ Jesus" (Eph. 3:21). God's plan required a blood bought church. Acts 20:28 declares, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." When Jesus established His church, He did something God commanded no man to do. When Jesus purchased the church with His own blood, He paid the price no man could ever pay. Glory to God in the church by Christ Jesus refers to the blood bought church that is built according to

the New Testament pattern with God's presence and power upon it. No other organization can truthfully claim to exist by Christ Jesus. Only a blood bought New Testament church can give God the glory "by Christ Jesus."

Jesus gave the work of the Great Commission to His church as an institution. Matthew 28:18-20 states, "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway even unto the end of the world. Amen." To whom did Jesus give His power, authority and commands concerning the work of the Great Commission? He gave it to His churches. He gave it to them as an institution since He promised, "I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world [age]" (verse 20). In every time since Jesus founded His church during His personal ministry, God has been present in the midst of His churches to empower them for the work He gave them to do.

Church perpetuity means that God will continue to get glory through New Testament churches until the end of this church age and throughout the eternal ages to come. Matthew 16:18 states, "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." *Perpetuity* means "to last forever." Church history reveals true churches have existed in every century from the church Jesus built until the present. There will always be at least one church somewhere in the world until Jesus comes in the air. Since God had determined to get glory from the church throughout all ages, He seeks to be glorified in it by His children today! Saved people should make it a point to

obey God by seeking scriptural baptism from a true church.

RELATED SCRIPTURE

Matthew 6:13. The Model Prayer emphasizes the need to pray for God's kingdom. The kingdom of God has several phases; yet, it is one kingdom. These phases include the Jewish theocracy, the family of God, the church and the millennial reign of Christ. In the present church age, churches should exalt Christ and obey God.

Romans 16:27. Creation and the Scripture make known to all nations the everlasting God. God receives glory when churches take the gospel to the world, when believers are baptized, church members are taught biblical truth and new churches are organized. God's glory is through New Testament churches.

Galatians 1:1-5. Paul wrote to the churches of Galatia with opening remarks praising the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Through Christ sinners can become children of God. Through Christ all spiritual blessings such as grace and peace may be received by believers. Through Christ there will come a day when He takes believers out of this world.

1 Timothy 1:17. God deserves glory. Glory has reference to light. When God's people praise the Lord and extol His greatness, they shine a light on the eternal King of glory. He is the only wise God who created, sustained and gives His providential supervision to the world.

1 Timothy 6:13-16. Paul spoke of God's glory in terms of the "light which no man can approach" (verse 16). Although God is invisible to men, His glory shines forth upon His creation. Those who turn to God in salvation should live for Christ until death or the "appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ" (verse 14) in the air.

Hebrews 13:21. God the Father works through Jesus Christ His Son to empower His children to mature and be equipped to do every good work that is according to His will. When believers do things that are acceptable to God, these works are made possible in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. He deserves our praise, reverence and devotion.

1 Peter 5:10, 11. God possesses eternal glory. Mankind may know God's glory through the manifestation of His Son Jesus. Christ gives believers who suffer the ability to endure, the power to obey and strength to live stable, God-honoring lives. By God's grace, we may so live that God's name is praised.

2 Peter 3:18. Realizing that the Lord should receive glory from our lives, we should "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (verse 18). Spiritual growth and understanding come from consistent, prayerful study of the Word of God. Believers should approach Bible study with a teachable spirit.

Jude 25. God's glory is unchanged whether or not man chooses to praise the Lord. God chooses to tell people to praise Him. Those who praise Him will reveal their personal belief in God's power as the eternal Lord, God and Savior of those who will believe.

RELEVANCE OF THE TEXT

Giving God the glory means extolling His honor, excellence, preeminence, majesty, praise and recognition. All glory should be given to God. God has chosen to receive glory from New Testament churches. The church is God's. He established His church. He died for it. Ephesians 5:23-25 declares, "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let

the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." His servants are saved, scripturally baptized believers who worship and serve Him as a part of a church.

Christ should be given the place of preeminence in worship. Each individual must consider whether or not he or she honors Christ in worship. Many things detract from worship. Our focus should be on the Lord, not on man. We should not be concerned with seeing the musician, the singer, the teacher or the preacher as much as we should be listening to get the most out of each song of praise, Bible lesson or sermon. The prayers should also exalt Christ. Worship is not about what I think, what I feel or what I think the Scripture means to me, it is all about God. Worship is not a place of entertainment. It is not a casual event! In worship, we come before Almighty God to praise Him and to thank Him for His goodness.

Many who come to worship are not prepared to do so. Successful churches keep their focus on the Lord, not on man. When we keep our eyes on Jesus, God's will and God's way and are ready to submit ourselves unto God in worship, there should be a heart or mind response to God and His Word. In the Old Testament, God detested some worship. (See Malachi 1:7, 8, 12, 13.) In the New Testament, some worship made God sick. (Rev. 3:16). Many erroneously think they

go to church for what the church can do to entertain them. Worship is all about giving God the glory He deserves.

CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

We should make every effort to recognize the Lord in worship. Prayer should be made to God at the beginning and end of worship. Worship with little or no prayer cannot glorify God. God's people should come to worship with a testimony to share. When Jacob prepared his family to go to the house of God, he shared his testimony concerning the faithfulness of God. Genesis 35:3 states, "And let us arise, and go up to Beth-el; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went." Those who were prepared for worship prayed before they came to the sanctuary.

In addition to prayer, God's people should have been seeking the Lord through His Word daily. Successful churches are made up of members who choose to witness and invite others to attend worship. Worship should be a celebration not a funeral. Many worship opportunities are lost when God's people mourn about those who are not present. We should delight in worship about those present to praise and honor God rather than being hindered by absentees. When God's people are prepared to worship and give glory to God, their time in God's house will be like sitting at the feet of Jesus.