



Systematic Theology

A study of the major doctrines of Scripture

TOPIC 6 – THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH
LESSON 117 – MARKS OF A HEALTHY CHURCH – PART 8
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Seven Marks of a Healthy Church

- ▶ What then are the marks of a sound church according to the Bible? We will summarize them into seven points over the next few weeks. These seven things must be present for a church to claim rightly that they are a church that is obedient to the Lord Jesus Christ.
- ▶ 1. God is worshipped in spirit and truth – Rom.12:1; Philip.3:3; John 4:5-26
- ▶ 2. Prayer is central – Acts 2:42, 1Thes.5:17
- ▶ 3. Love for Christ and the Brethren is demonstrated – 1 Pet.1:22, Jam.1:22
- ▶ 4. The Word of God is faithfully preached, taught, and heard – Acts 6:4, 13:44; Rom.10:17; 2Tim.4:2
- ▶ 5. The Ordinances of Baptism and Communion are administered – Acts 2:42; Mat.28:19
- ▶ 6. Discipline of the membership is Biblically administered – 1 Cor.5:10-13; Mat.18:15-17
- ▶ 7. Church government and leadership as instituted by the Apostles is established – Acts 14:23, 6:2-3; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9

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- ▶ 7. Church government and leadership as instituted by the Apostles is established.
- ▶ Acts 14:23 So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.
- ▶ 1 Tim. 3:1 This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. 2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; 3 not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; 4 one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence 5 (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); 6 not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. 7 Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

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- ▶ Titus 1:5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you— 6 if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. 7 For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, 8 but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, 9 holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.

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- ▶ Let's start with a few facts. Plain truth. The church is not a democracy. The majority does not always know the will of God. Actually, God usually uses a small remnant to accomplish His will. As we have already learned, He expects us to do things the way in which He ordained it and instructs us that it to be done. So how does the Scripture tell us that the church is to be lead, or “run?”
- ▶ The Bible is very clear and specific that God gives as a special gift to His church its leaders! That's right. He gives them to each church. They are not randomly selected or voted in and out of office by popular vote. They are not elected for a term and the replaced by a younger, fresher face. They are not chosen for their people skills or abilities. They are chosen by God based on their calling (*inward and outward*) and character qualifications to fill the job that He assigns to them. He gives them to the church.

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- ▶ Let us also be clear about the Source of Authority in the Church:
- ▶ Jesus Christ is head of the Church (Eph. 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Col. 1:18; 2:19; 1 Cor. 11:3).
- ▶ His sovereign Lordship was bestowed upon Him by the Father (Mat. 11:27; John 3:35; 5:22; Acts 2:36; Phil. 2:9-11).
- ▶ **The Lord Jesus is the Church's Supreme Authority ruling by His Word illuminated and taught by His Spirit through those He ordains to speak on His behalf.**
- ▶ Matthew 28:18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth."
- ▶ In His earthly ministry Jesus demonstrated divine authority and sovereign power over demons (Matt. 8:32; 12:22), disease (Matt. 4:23-24), sin (Matt. 9:6), the weather (Mark 4:39), the elements (Matt. 14:19-20; Matt. 15:36-37), and death (Mark 5:41-42; John 11:43-44; John 10:18).

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- ▶ Jesus rules heaven and earth as everything was created and is sustained by Him (John 1:1-4; Col. 1:16-17; Heb. 1:3; Eph. 1:20-21; John 5:27-29; 17:2).
- ▶ One day all of creation will bow and confess this truth, “Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil. 2:9-11).
- ▶ Submission to the absolute Lordship of Christ is not optional for the believer. We are called to submit joyfully to His commands and rule over us (John 14:15, 21, 23; 15:10; 1 John 5:3; 2 John 6).

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- ▶ Jesus, as Head of the Church, is not only her supreme authority but is also the source of her salvation. He is the “author and finisher” or “founder and perfecter” of our faith (Heb. 12:2), having purchased through His death “a people for His own possession who are zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14).
- ▶ Christ is the cornerstone on which the church is founded (1 Peter 2:4-8), established by Him (Matt. 16:18) and built upon the apostolic witness to the truth about Him (Eph. 2:20).
- ▶ 1 Cor. 3:11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

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- ▶ The absolute rule of Christ as Head of the Church is administered through godly leaders whom He has given as gifts to the church to lead His people (1 Thess. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:7, 17).
- ▶ In Ephesians 4:11, Paul says of the ascended Christ, “He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.” (see 1 Cor. 12:28).
- ▶ The Apostles and Prophets played a unique foundational role in the establishment of the church, having been part of laying the foundation of the church.
- ▶ Ephesians 2:19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.

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- ▶ Those He gives were in Bible times the Apostles and Prophets. These offices were filled and no longer exist in active practice in the church today. These were men who spoke specifically for God to the nation of Israel and to the church, sharing direct revelation from the mouth of God.
- ▶ An Apostle (the word means “one sent on a mission”) were chosen by Christ, physically saw Him after the resurrection (Acts 1:21-22; 1 Cor 15:7), numbered 12 in total (Rev 21:14) including the Disciples (Matthew 10:2-3), with Paul (1 Cor 9:1) replacing Judas. Apostles served these three purposes in the church:
 - ▶ 1. Laid the foundation of the church (Eph 2:20)
 - ▶ 2. Received, Wrote, and Declared God’s Word (Eph 3:5; Acts 11:28; 21:10-11)
 - ▶ 3. Confirmed the Word by miracles and signs (2 Cor 12:12; Acts 8:6-7; Heb 2:3-4)

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- ▶ Prophets also comprise the foundation of the church, along with the Apostles, and Jesus, Who is the Cornerstone. They served both in the Old and New Testament (Hebrews 1:1-2), called by God (Jeremiah 1:5, etc.) and given direct revelation of truth by His Spirit to convey to His people and to others (Jeremiah 7:25). Prophets often foretold future events and were judged by a strict criteria. If a prophet gave one false prophecy then he was branded a false prophet and was never to be trusted (Deut. 18:21-22). In the New Testament church prophets were to have what they preached tested by the Apostles (1 Cor 14:32) and proclaimed truth from the Old Testament in order to aid the church in spiritual growth.

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- ▶ Those He gave then and now continue to be evangelists and pastor-teachers.
- ▶ Evangelists are called and tasked specifically with preaching the gospel to those in need of conversion (Acts 21:8). While pastors are to do the work of an evangelist (2 Tim 4:5), there is also the sense in which this is a separate calling and office within the church. This would be seen today as missionaries and church planters.
- ▶ Pastor-teachers (the word pastor literally means “shepherd”) are responsible to lead the church in preaching and teaching, applying proper doctrine and exhortation to equip the saints for the carrying out of the ministry in their own daily lives.

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- ▶ By identifying the Apostles and Prophets with the foundation-laying stage of the church, Paul indicates that those offices were limited to the earliest stages of church history. The foundation of a building is laid once at the beginning of construction, so the age of the Apostles and Prophets occurred at the outset of church history and has not been repeated since.
- ▶ In this foundational role, the Apostles and Prophets declared the revelation of God's Word (Eph. 3:5; Acts 11:28; 21:10-11) and confirmed their message with miraculous signs (2 Cor. 12:12; Acts 8:6-7; Heb. 2:3-4).
- ▶ The second group of gifted leaders, evangelists and pastor-teachers, have been building upon this foundation since it was laid, by the faithful proclamation and preaching of the Word (2 Tim. 4:1-5).

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- ▶ Ultimately then we see that all authority in the church flows from the Headship of Christ, mediated through the right teaching and preaching of His Word to His people by those called and chosen by Him to serve the church as His ministers.
- ▶ Second London Baptist Confession of Faith, 1689: “The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience. The supreme judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and by which must be examined all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, and doctrines of men and private spirits can be no other than the Holy Scripture, delivered by the Spirit. And in the sentence of Scripture we are to rest, for it is in Scripture, delivered by the Spirit, that our faith is finally resolved.”

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- ▶ Next week we will continue to define the character and duties of pastor-teachers.