

# Choosing a Church

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by Joel Wong



# Intro:

- My testimony of choosing a church
  - God changed my life through the local church.
  - Jesus ministered to me personally through the body of Christ.
- Our focus today
  - Consider the significant role of the church in the Christian life.
  - Identify biblical principles on what to look for in a local church.
  - Seek God's guidance through prayer and wise counsel from others.



# Overview

1. C : Chosen & Called Together
2. H : Honoring God Together
3. U : Understanding God's Word Together
4. R : Relationship Building (Together)
5. C : Changing & Growing Together
6. H : History of the Church (quick overview)

# 1. ( C ) Chosen & Called Together

- **What** is the church? (it's always good to start with definition)
- Definition in Greek:
  - Ekklēsia - mostly refer to **a local congregation of Christians** and never a building.
    - New Bible Dictionary (NBD)
    - Robinson, D. W. B. (1996). Church. In D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, & D. J. Wiseman (Eds.), New Bible dictionary (3rd ed., p. 199). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

# Old Testament Background: God's Chosen People

- **God's chosen people started with Israel in the OT**
- Israel was a nation, God's people, not the religious building, (i.e. Temple)
- NT church does not equal to OT Temple. (we don't bring a cow to church to burn)
  
- Can someone read
- **Romans 9:4-5**
  - 4 They are **Israelites**, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the temple service, and the promises. 5 The **ancestors** are theirs, and from them, by **physical descent**, came the Messiah, who is God over all, praised forever. Amen. (HCSB)

# Old Testament Background: God's Chosen People

- Romans 9:6-8
  - "6 But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. 7 Neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants. On the contrary, your offspring will be traced through Isaac. 8 That is, it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but the children of the promise are considered to be the offspring." (HCSB)
- OT's concept of God's people started with Israelites as a **chosen nation** (physical Israel) but later fully revealed in the NT as "**children of promise**" (a.k.a The True Israel / Spiritual Israel).
- OT did not use the word "church", but the concept of God's people was conveyed in terminology such as "**children of promise**".

# New Testament

- Definition in Greek:
  - Ekklēsia - mostly designates **a local congregation of Christians** and never a building. (NBD)
- 1. The Church / the church** (\*not followed strictly, but just to avoid confusion)
  - Usually referring to the Invisible Church (Children of promise / true Israel / Spiritual Israel)
  - Includes all believers everywhere. (I.e. In the hymn "The Church's one foundation")
  - Not to be confused with the Catholic Church.
  - Paul also used the word "saints" chosen by God before the foundation of the world. (Ephesians 1:4)
- 2. church**
  - Usually referring to a local church congregation (the visible church).
  - NT letters to the church, seven churches in Asia (Revelation 1:4).
  - Chosen by you (or perhaps your parents?)

# Diagnostic Question: What to look for in a local church?

- Does the local church consist of true believers? (or just a temple, religious building or House of Prayer/Worship?)
- Does the local church call people to have personal faith in Jesus?
- Does the local church function as gathering of believers or more like a Temple? (Holy Ground, sanctuary, altar)



**Any Question?**

## 2. ( H ) Honoring God Together

- First thing first!
  - a. **Why** church? (What is the mission and purpose of the church?)

### **Ezekiel 36:22-23**

“Therefore, say to the house of Israel: This is what the Lord GOD says: It is not for your sake that I will act, house of Israel, but **for My holy name**, which you profaned among the nations where you went. **23** I will **honor the holiness of My great name**, which has been profaned among the nations – the name you have profaned among them. The nations will know that I am Yahweh” – the declaration of the Lord GOD – “when I demonstrate My holiness through you in their sight. (HCSB)

- First and foremost, God's people are called together to **worship** and **honor** God's name.
- The church exist for **God's glory** (Humans are not the center of attention).

## 2. ( H ) Honoring God Together

### i. Honoring / Worshiping God together (inside the "church building"?)

John 4:21-24

<sup>21</sup> Jesus told her, “Believe Me, woman, an hour is coming when you will worship the Father **neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.** <sup>22</sup> You Samaritans worship what you do not know. We worship what we do know, because salvation is from the Jews. <sup>23</sup> But an hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father **in spirit and truth.** Yes, the Father wants such people to worship Him. <sup>24</sup> God is spirit, and those who worship Him must **worship in spirit and truth.**”

- Church primarily exist for God's glory, but true worship is not limited to a specific location.

## 2. ( H ) Honoring God Together

### ii. Holy Life Together (outside the "church building"?)

#### **Romans 12: 1-2**

Therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, I urge you to **present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God**; this is your **spiritual worship**.<sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

- Local church is a group of Christians committed to help one another to honor God **not only** in the church building, but **in every area of their lives**. *#living\_scrifice*

# Diagnostic Question: What to look for in a local church?

- Does the local church glorify God or man? (celebrity pastor, or manmade objects: nice building, musical performance, church traditions, even impressive projects etc.)
- Does the local church put more emphasis on what happens in the church building or the holiness of the members in everyday life?
- Does the local church help you to grow in holiness and love for God?



**Any Question?**

# 3. ( U ) Understanding God's Word Together

a. **What** is the foundation of the church?

God's Word, the Holy Bible, 66 books, is the foundation of church.

i. God's word, the gospel and the Statement of Faith

## **Colossians 3:16**

<sup>16</sup> Let the message about the Messiah dwell richly among you, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, and singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, with gratitude in your hearts to God.

- Where can you find the Statement of Faith?
  - Church website
  - Ask the church pastor or elder

### 3. ( U ) Understanding God's Word Together

ii. Christ is the head of the church - "I will build my church"

Matthew 16:18

<sup>18</sup> And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock **I will build My church**, and the forces of Hades will not overpower it. (HCSB)

Ephesians 4:15

<sup>15</sup> But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into Him who is **the head – Christ.** (HCSB)

- Church must submit under the Lordship of Christ and his word.



# Diagnostic Question: What to look for in a local church?

- Does the local church preach and teach the gospel of Christ? (Expository preaching, Christ-centered, faithful to the text)
- Does the local church help you to know Jesus and understand his word deeper? (Weekly sermon, Bible study, daily devotion, discipleship courses)
- Does the local church seek to listen and follow the command of Jesus.



**Any Question?**

# 4. ( R ) Relationship Building (Together)

*"I used to be a people person until people ruined it!" - Anonymous*

*"Just look at God. Don't look at people" - Anonymous*

a. **HOW** do we do church?

i. Relating to Insiders (church members)

**John 13:35**

<sup>35</sup> By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you **have love for one another.**"  
(HCSB)

**1 Corinthians 13:1-3**

**13** If I speak human or angelic languages but do not have **love**, I am a sounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

2 If I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith

so that I can move mountains but do not have **love**, I am nothing. 3 And if I donate all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body in order to boast but do not have **love**, I gain nothing. (HCSB)

# 4. ( R ) Relationship Building (Together)

a. **HOW** do we do church?

ii. Relating to the outsiders (non-members/non-believers)

## Colossians 4:5

<sup>5</sup> Act **wisely** toward outsiders, making the most of the time. <sup>6</sup> Your speech should always be **gracious**, seasoned with **salt**, so that you may know how you should **answer** each person. (HCSB)

- In Colossians 4, Paul asked the church members to pray for him and for open doors to proclaim the gospel. Church are called to **love and support one another for the purpose of God's mission in the world.** #mission\_together

# Diagnostic Question: What to look for in a local church?

- Does the local church encourage relationship building between the church members? (morning tea, communal meals, prayer partners, badminton fellowship, mamak session! ;) ...)
- Does the local church have toxic relationship or dirty politics? (racism, discrimination, exclusive clubs, power mongering, bullying, gossiping...)
- Does the local church have the heart for evangelism and mission?



# Any Question?

- How a collectivist fit into an individualistic church culture?
  - Collectivist culture emphasize on the goal of the group.
  - Individualistic culture emphasize on personal goals.
  - Where do you fit in? (Having a sense of belonging)
- How an individualist fit into a collective church culture?
  - No privacy?
  - No personal time?
  - No room for personal opinion?

# 5. ( C ) Change & Grow Together

*"Don't look for a perfect church. If you find one, don't go there, because you are not!" - Anonymous*

a. **WHO** is the church for anyway?

i. Christ-centered church vs. Consumer-centered church

- Christ-centered church focus on the teaching of Christ and **imitating the life of Christ.**
- Servanthood attitude says *"How can I serve?" ... "What can I give?"*
- Consumer attitude says *"How can the church serve me better?"... "What can I get?"*
- Church is first for **God's glory**, second for **edification of the saints** and thirdly for the gospel to reach **outsiders**. (Not for personal gain / meet all personal preferences)
- So don't be too quick to condemn a church short-coming or lacking. Be gracious. Be observant, but don't be over critical. Ask *"What can I bring to the table?"*

# 5. ( C ) Change & Grow Together

## ii. Change focused church vs. Comfort focused church

- Accountability:

**Hebrews 3:12**

Watch out, brothers, so that there won't be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart that departs from the living God. **13** But **encourage** each other daily, while it is still called today, so that none of you is hardened by sin's deception.

- Church Discipline:

**Galatians 6:1**

Brothers, if someone is caught in any **wrongdoing**, you who are spiritual should **restore** such a person with a gentle spirit, watching out for yourselves so you also won't be tempted.

# Diagnostic Question: What to look for in a local church?

- Does the local church preach about sin and repentance regularly?
- Does the local church have a culture of confessing sin to one another?  
(Church discipline, commitment, membership, doctrinal conviction)
- Can I grow together with the church to be more like Christ?



**Any Question?**

# 5. ( H ) History of the Church

*"History... \*yawn\* ... is more important than you think!"*

## a. Lesson from Church History

- i. Lesson from the Early Church (Acts & NT churches, first 1000 years)
  - There were many false teachers and heresies.
  - Learn about the common false teaching and heresies, so you can avoid the mistakes made by others.
  - Example:
    - Arianism - False teaching of the Trinity (Jesus is not God).
    - Modern day cult making the same mistake - Jehovah Witnesses (Jesus is only a son of God, but not God)
  - Study the Creeds
    - Apostle's Creed
    - Nicene Creed

# 5. ( H ) History of the Church

## ii. Lesson from the Reformation – around 1500

- Catholic, Protestant & other denominations
- Read about the Roman Catholic Church
  - Indulgences: Forgiveness of sin can be bought with money.
  - Confession: Catholic priest has the power to forgive sins (like a middle man).
  - Mass: Sacraments given by the Catholic priest is required for salvation.
  - Purgatory: In between state after death. Make up for past sins in order to enter heaven.
  - Pope: Papa (father) of the Catholic church. Representative of God in the world.
- Read about the Reformation movements
  - Martin Luther, The Five Solas, English Puritans, Protestant church

# 5. ( H ) History of the Church

## ii. Lesson from the Reformation (Protestant & other denominations)

- Read about different denominations and their beliefs:
  - Lutheran church
  - Anglican church
  - Presbyterian church
  - Wesley / Methodist church
  - Brethren church
  - Baptist church
  - Pentecostal church
  - Uniting church (Australia)
  - Non-denominational?

# Diagnostic Question: What to look for in a local church?

- Does the local church believe and teach Justification by Faith? (or do they teach earning salvation by works)
- What is the church government and whose authority are you under?
- What is the church denomination and the leader's conviction?
  - Essentials: Doctrine about Trinity, Salvation and Scripture.
  - Non-essential but important: Baptism, Holy Communion, Discipleship, Mission.
  - Not important but wisdom: Location, music, language, belonging, service, spouse...

# Pray and seek God for wisdom

## Other considerations

- Location, who are in the local community?
- Transitional, job posting (University, CF, no church)
- Language and culture (Chinese, Tamil, BM/Indo, English, Japanese, Korean...)
- Cross-cultural Mission (If you are preparing to be a missionary)
- Are you a leader? Following a mentor (who is available to you)
- Are you finding a spouse? Try not to make it the No.1 reason ;)

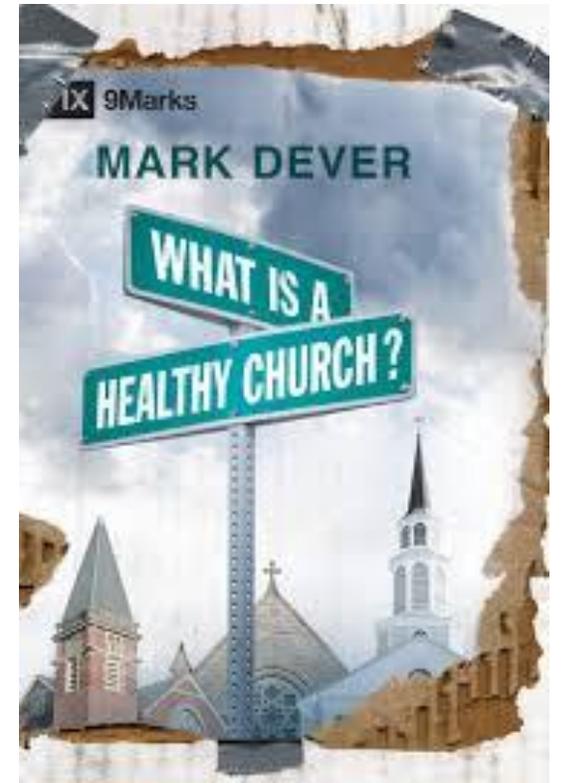
# Resources

Book:

Mark Dever, What Is A Healthy Church

Website:

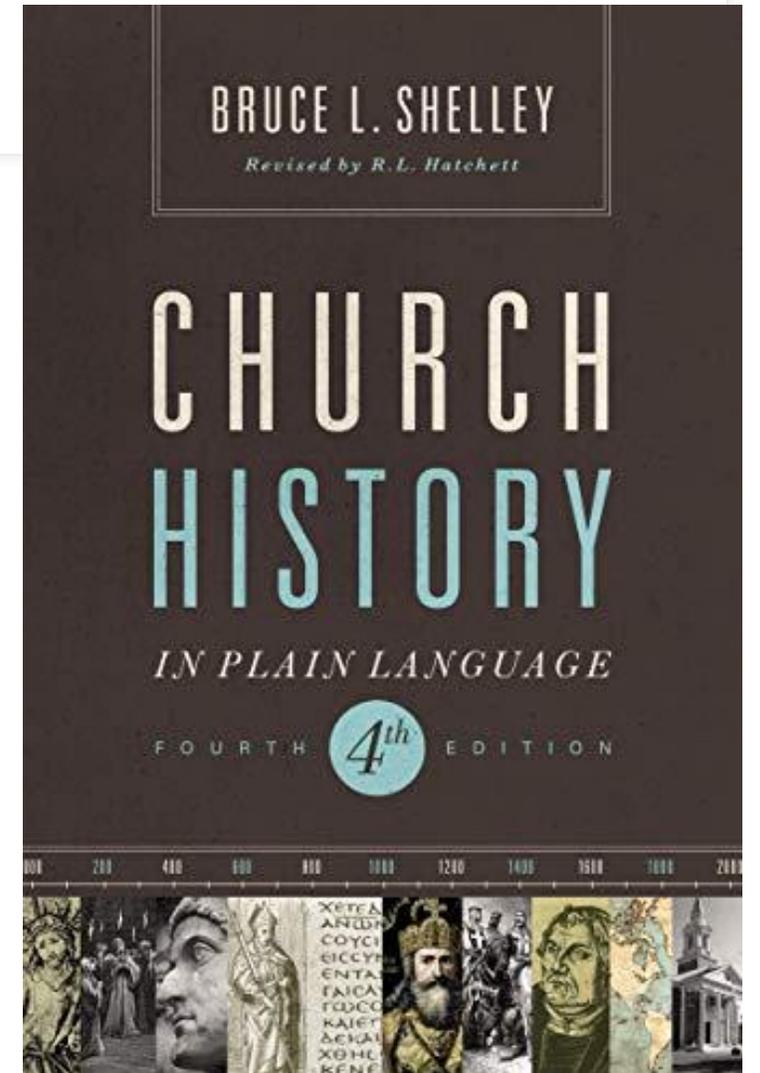
[9marks.org](http://9marks.org)



# Resources

Book:

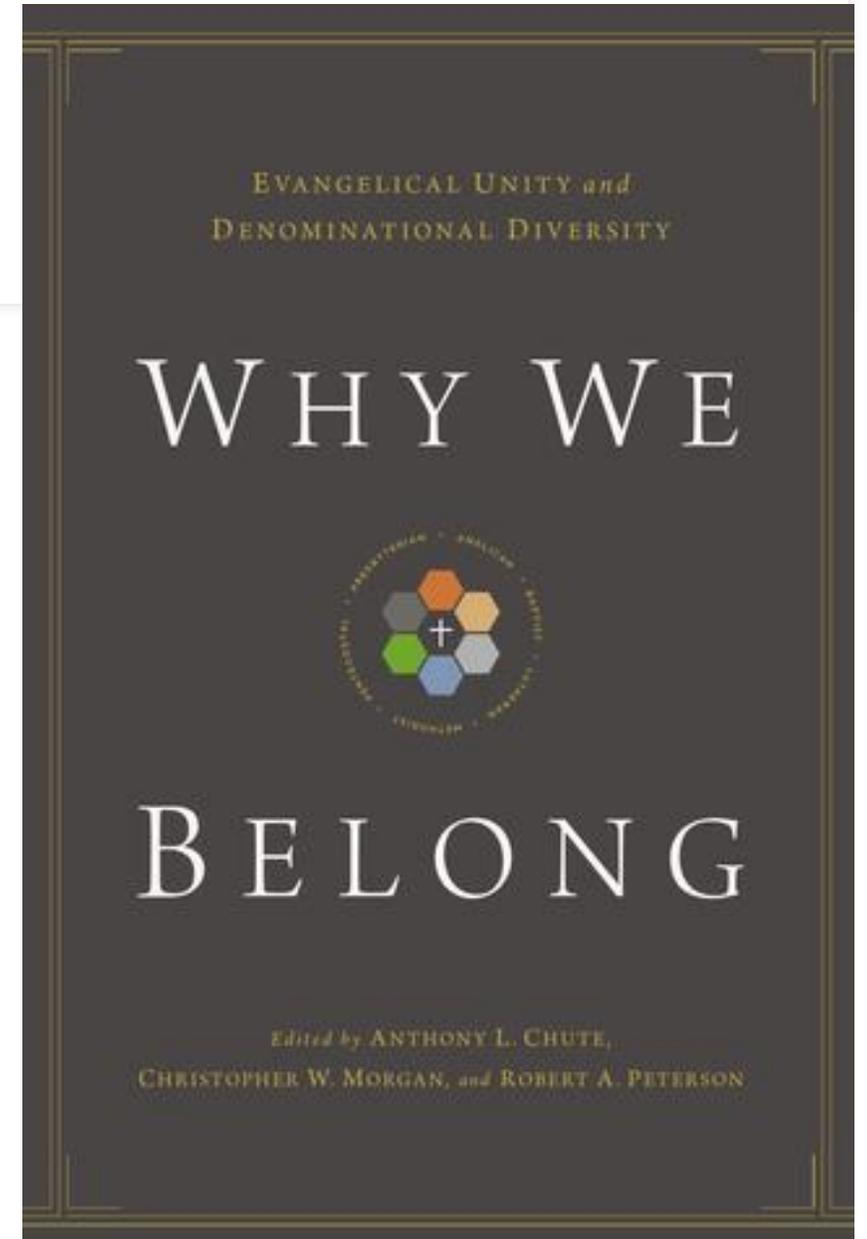
Bruce Shelley, Church History in Plain Language



# Resources

Book:

Why We Belong: Evangelical Unity and Denominational Diversity (Crossway)





**Any Other Question?**



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