

What Makes a Great Church

By Robert C. Veil, Jr.

Each of us should want the local church to be as great as it can be. Even when things are going well, the congregation is growing, and times are exciting for us, we should strive to improve wherever we can. There is always room for improvement, and there are some specific things to keep in mind when considering what makes a great church:

1. Great churches are composed of strong, healthy families. Time spent in improving your family is time well spent in the building of the church. Husbands and wives should be praying and working for strengthened marriages and solid homes. This is the time to consider attending a marriage improvement workshop, reading scriptural materials about strengthening your family, and working hard to follow God's blueprint for a happy and healthy home. Congregations prosper to the extent that the families which comprise them do, (cf. 1 Cor. 12:25-26).

2. Great churches focus upon and prioritize the activities of the church. The planned activities of the church are always well attended by the members. Family vacations are planned around church activities, and not vice versa. Since it is known when activities such as Ladies Day, Gospel Meetings, Friends Day, etc. will be, these days are always kept clear on family calendars. Every member should plan and work diligently to be present for every assembly. Although there are occasional illnesses or other matters which may prevent attendance, it should never be a matter of deciding at the last minute whether or not we will attend the services. That decision was made long ago, (cf. Mt. 6:33)..

3. Great churches have members who encourage and support each other. They are friendly to one another before and after the services, in and around the building, and are involved in each others' lives. They try to be aware of the illnesses and other challenges their brethren are facing, and provide the support and encouragement so desperately needed. They recognize that everyone needs encouragement, and they are quick to say a good word to and for each other. You will not find them bad-mouthing or criticizing other members of the church, (cf. Heb. 3:13).

4. Great churches are united in the truth of God's word. When scriptural teaching is pointed out on any matter, it settles all questions and disputes. The members have learned to yield their personal opinions in all matters of expediency, which really count for very little in view of eternity. Great churches are like well-practiced armies marching in unison. They are united in their work, in their love for the truth, and in their zeal for the Master. You will likely get the same answer from any one of them on any important Bible question, (cf. 1 Cor. 1:10).

5. Great churches are welcoming to newcomers. Their members are on the lookout for visitors, and they quickly make them feel at ease. They see them not as strangers, or threats, or someone in their way, but as precious souls. They will gladly give to them "their" parking space, "their" pew, or their dinner. And visitors can usually spot great churches. Here, they feel loved and welcome. They feel a desire to return. What these churches are really saying to newcomers is, "I am glad you are here because this is the place where God's grace can reach you, as it has me," (cf. 1 Cor. 6:11).

6. Great churches have great leaders, who are respected and followed by the members. The leaders are well-qualified according to the Scriptures. They are concerned about keeping the church pure, and also about helping every member reach their fullest

potential. They are in frequent prayer for the members, and feel for them when they hurt. They meet often, and give unselfishly of their time. The members know that they are hard at work, often at times when no one is aware. The preaching is "true to the book" and timely. It may regularly "step on toes," but does so across the board, and is done in love, (cf. 1 Tim. 5:17ff).

7. Great churches are not particularly interested in the latest fad. Here you will not find extremes like emotionalism, formalism or ritualism. The worship is not cold and dead, nor is it showy or performance-driven. God is the audience, not man. The services are well planned and respectful, not designed to impress shallow people or haphazard. Great churches are more interested in pleasing God than in pleasing the community, even though they love the community and are making a positive impact on it. In short, great churches recognize that they are in this thing for the long run, in view of *eternity*, (cf. Rev. 2:4-5).