



10 Traits of the Ancient & Modern Church (Week 2)

Since we're doing a series on the doctrine of the church, the book in the Bible that mentions the word church more than any other book is the book of Acts (17 times). So, today we're going to look at the book of Acts from 10,000 feet and look at 10 traits of the early church (which should also be traits of the modern church).

But since the gospel gives birth to the church, before we turn to the book of Acts, let's look at...

Matthew 16:15-18

15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

That's really the question that the church continues to answer from week to week. If that's not the burning question of your heart, then you're asking the wrong questions. It's not just that Jesus Christ is the most influential person who ever lived, but the church proclaims that if you do not know this Person now — you will not live.

16 Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

There's a lot packed into that answer. First, Jesus is the Christ, the Anointed One, the One Chosen, the One sent by God who is the Son of the living God, meaning He is Equal to God. We could summarize it this way. Jesus is the One sent by God to show us God because He is God.

17 And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

You don't come to the conclusion that Jesus is the Christ, that He is the Savior of the world, because you're insightful or brilliant or anything else. You come to that conclusion because God graciously reveals it to you.

John 6:44

44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.

Resurrection is your destiny. No matter who you are, that is your destiny. The question is will you be resurrected to everlasting glory or will you be resurrected to judgment? Christ has taken the judgment that we deserve. He's the only way to avoid it.

Matthew 16:18

18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

- 1. The church is built upon the confession of the gospel (who Jesus Christ is and what**

He has done). In other words, the gospel is central.

Acts 5:11

11 And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.

2. The church must have a deep reverence for God.

A healthy church has a healthy view of God. They know who they are dealing with and take it to heart. In other words, there is intensity to their view of God. There is reverence in their view of God.

It has been said, “Apathy towards Christ is out of sync with his worthiness.”

You’re greatest problem is how you view God, because a distorted view of God will lead to a distorted Christian life.

Something that we’re told over and over again in these passages about the church is that they feared the Lord.

Acts 9:31

31 So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

Fear and comfort are connected. How can that be? Well, think of the scariest thing in life that you can experience now. Okay, the created thing is never greater than the Creator. If you know the One who created the scariest thing in the world and you know He is for you, that’s comforting.

Low views of God produces irreverence toward God even in the church.

A. W. Tozer, writing in *The Knowledge of the Holy* (1961), put it this way:

The church has surrendered her once lofty concept of God and has substituted for it one so low, so ignoble, as to be utterly unworthy of thinking, worshipping men. This she has done not deliberately, but little by little and without her knowledge; and her very unawareness only makes her situation all the more tragic. This low view of God entertained almost universally among Christians is the

cause of a hundred lesser evils everywhere among us. A whole new philosophy of the Christian life has resulted from this one basic error in our religious thinking.

With our loss of the sense of majesty has come the further loss of religious awe and consciousness of the divine Presence. We have lost our spirit of worship and our ability to withdraw inwardly to meet God in adoring silence. Modern Christianity is simply not producing the kind of Christian who can appreciate or experience the life in the Spirit. The words, "Be still, and know that I am God," mean next to nothing to the self-confident, bustling worshipper in this middle period of the twentieth century.

This loss of the concept of majesty has come just when the forces of religion are making dramatic gains and the churches are more prosperous than at any time within the past several hundred ...

3. God scatters His church for the sake of the gospel.

Acts 8:1

8 And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

It has been said that the most effective means of spreading the gospel is persecution. The second most effective is church planting.

The point here is that God will sometimes use circumstances to scatter His church and in that scattering He has good things planned, like people who are far from God coming near to God for the first time.

Acts 8:4

4 Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.

Every church has their own unique DNA which God uses to reach people that other churches can't reach.

There are plenty of sinners for everybody.

That's why God scatters His church.

4. The church reports about God moving among them.

Acts 11:22

22 The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

The church should report what's going on. If God is moving, let's hear about it.

Hints of God's hand:

- "Who are the leaders?" Leaders are willing to take a stand. They have to be willing to take a stand, especially when biblical principals are at stake.

Acts 14:27

27 And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.

5. The church must be a Bible-teaching church.

Acts 11:26

26 and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

It must be Bible-saturated. It needs teaching, discipleship, coaching, etc. that is systematic, meaning it's done according to a fixed plan.

The point of all this teaching is to make us more like Jesus. God making us more like Jesus is called sanctification. It's the working out of character in our lives. Justification is God declaring us to be holy because the righteous life of Christ is transferred to us. It's just given to us as a gift.

- Exodus story

Sanctification is God working out in us righteousness experientially. This is a lifelong process.

- Closing thoughts