

The Marks of a Healthy Church¹

1. Expository Preaching

An expository sermon takes the main point of a passage of Scripture, makes it the main point of the sermon, and applies it to life today.

Expository preaching is important because God's Word is what convicts, converts, builds up, and sanctifies God's people (Heb 4:12; 1 Pet 1:23; 1 Thess 2:13; John 17:17). Preaching that makes the main point of the text the main point of the sermon makes God's agenda rule the church, not the preacher's.

2. Biblical Theology

Biblical theology is sound doctrine; it is right thoughts about God; it is belief that accords with Scripture (1 Tim 1:5; 2 John 1–6; Titus 2:1–10).

Biblical theology is important because it is essential for evangelism, discipleship, unity, and worship.

3. The Gospel

The gospel (good news) is that:

1. The one and only God who is holy made us in his image to know him (Gen 1:26–28)
2. But we sinned and cut ourselves off from him (Gen 3; Rom 3:23)
3. In his great love, God became a man in Jesus, lived a perfect life, and died on the cross, thus fulfilling the law himself and taking on himself the punishment for the sins of all those who would ever turn from their sin and trust in him (John 1:14; Heb 7:26; Rom 3:21–26, 5:12–21)
4. He rose again from the dead, showing that God accepted Christ's sacrifice and that God's wrath against us had been exhausted (Acts 2:24; Rom 4:25)
5. He now calls us to repent of our sins and trust in Christ alone for our forgiveness (Acts 17:30; John 1:12). If we repent of our sins and trust in Christ, we are born again into a new life, an eternal life with God (John 3:16)
6. He is gathering one new people to himself among all those who submit to Christ as Lord (Matt 16:15–19; Eph 2:11–19).

A biblical understanding of the gospel is important because the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, and it is the only way for sinful people to be reconciled to a holy God. Not only that, but everything in a church flows from its understanding of the gospel, whether preaching, counseling, discipleship, music, evangelism, missions, and on.

¹ These marks are based on Mark Dever's book *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* and the website 9marks.org

4. A Biblical Understanding of Conversion

A biblical understanding of conversion recognizes both what God does and what people do in salvation. In conversion, God:

1. gives life to the dead (Eph 2:5)
2. gives sight to the blind (2 Cor 4:3–6)
3. gives the gifts of faith and repentance (Phil 1:29; Acts 11:18).

And in conversion, people: repent of sin (Mark 1:15; Acts 3:19) and believe in Jesus (John 3:16; Rom 3:21–26).

A biblical understanding of conversion recognizes that only God can save, and that he saves individuals by enabling them to respond to the gospel message through repenting of sin and trusting in Christ.

A biblical understanding of conversion is important for churches because:

1. It clarifies how churches should exhort non-Christians—they should call non-Christians to repent of sin and trust in Christ.
2. It reminds churches that they must rely upon God in all of their evangelistic efforts; only he can give new spiritual life.
3. It teaches churches to maintain a sharp distinction between themselves and the world.

Church members' lives should be marked by the fruit of conversion, and churches should admit to baptism and the Lord's Supper only those who show evidence of conversion.

Churches should evangelize and teach about the Christian life in such a way that the radical nature of conversion is continually emphasized.

5. A Biblical Understanding of Evangelism

Evangelism is simply telling non-Christians the good news about what Jesus Christ has done to save sinners with the aim to persuade them to repent and believe. In order to biblically evangelize you must:

1. Preach the whole gospel, even the hard news about God's wrath against our sin.
2. Call people to repent of their sins and trust in Christ.
3. Make it clear that believing in Christ is costly, but worth it.

A biblical understanding of evangelism is important because when a church has an unbiblical understanding of the gospel, they don't evangelize, they evangelize in misleading or manipulative ways, or they share a message that's not the gospel.

On the other hand, a biblical understanding of evangelism clarifies our role in the mission God has given to the church: we are to preach the good news about what Christ has done and pray that God would bring people to believe it.

6. A Biblical Understanding of Church Membership

According to the Bible, church membership is a commitment every Christian should make to attend, love, serve, and submit to a local church (1 Cor 5:12; 2 Cor 2:6; Acts 20:28; Heb 13:17).

Biblical church membership is important because the church presents God's witness of himself in the world. It displays his glory. In the church's membership, then, non-Christians should see in the lives of God's changed people that God is holy and gracious and that his gospel is powerful for saving and transforming sinners.

7. Biblical Church Discipline

In the broadest sense, church discipline is everything the church does to help its members pursue holiness and fight sin. Preaching, teaching, prayer, corporate worship, accountability relationships, and godly oversight by pastors and elders are all forms of discipline.

In a narrower sense, church discipline is the act of correcting sin in the life of the body, including the possible final step of excluding a professing Christian from membership in the church and participation in the Lord's Supper because of serious unrepentant sin (Matt 18:15–20; 1 Cor 5:1–13).

Biblical church discipline is important because without discipline, we won't grow as God wants us to. With discipline, we will, by God's grace, bear peaceful fruit of righteousness (Heb 12:5–11).

8. A Concern for Discipleship and Growth

Scripture teaches that a true Christian is a growing Christian (2 Pet 1:8–10). Scripture also teaches that we grow not only by instruction, but by imitation (1 Cor 4:16, 11:1). Therefore churches should exhort their members to both grow in holiness and help others do the same.

A concern for biblical discipleship and growth is important because none of us are finished products. Until we die, all Christians will struggle against sin, and we need all the help we can get in this fight. If a church neglects discipleship and growth, or teaches a skewed, unbiblical version of it, it will discourage genuine Christians and wrongly assure false Christians. On the other hand, if a church fosters a culture of Christian discipleship and growth, it will multiply believers' efforts to grow in holiness.

9. Biblical Church Leadership

The Bible teaches that each local church should be led by a plurality of godly, qualified men called elders.

Paul lays out the qualifications for elders in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9. Passages that evidence a plurality of elders in one local church include Acts 14:23, Acts 20:17, 1 Timothy 4:14, 1 Timothy 5:17, and James 5:14.

Biblical church leadership is important because God gifts churches with elders to:

1. feed God's sheep God's word (John 21:15–17)
2. guide the sheep (1 Tim 4:16; 1 Pet 5:3; Heb 13:7)
3. protect the sheep from attackers (Acts 20:27–29; 2 Tim 4:3–4; Titus 1:9)
4. while protecting both themselves and the church through the wisdom of their plurality (Prov 11:14; 24:6)

The bottom line? Biblical church leadership is important because without it, God's people are like sheep without shepherds.