

S T U D Y   G U I D E



MARKS *of a*  
HEALTHY CHURCH

MARK DEVER & JONATHAN LEEMAN

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# Marks of a Healthy Church

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# What Is the Church?

## INTRODUCTION

To understand what the church is, we must first have an idea about what the church is supposed to be. In this lesson, Dr. Dever examines Paul's first letter to the Corinthians to show us how the church is to reflect God's character.

## LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. To define the church as reflected in God's holiness, unity, and love
2. To emphasize the church's great responsibility in reflecting God's holiness, unity, and love

## SCRIPTURE READING

*For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.*

—1 Corinthians 12:12

## LECTURE OUTLINE

- A. The church is to be holy.
  1. Holiness is strangeness to the world and a special relationship with God.
    - a. The church consists of those called to be holy and blameless, those set apart from the world in a special relationship with God.
    - b. Our message and wisdom is different than the message and wisdom of the world, which is one of the central themes of 1 Corinthians 1–2.

- c. Christians are God's temple, and because God's temple is sacred, the church is called to be pure (1 Cor. 3:16).
  2. God has always been concerned with the purity of His people.
    - a. In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul addressed the sexual sin of the church.
    - b. Paul appeals to the Corinthians with the same refrain that God spoke to the Israelites who were preparing to enter the Promised Land (1 Cor. 5:13).
  3. Holiness is an essential part of the Christian life.
    - a. Paul argues that Christians have been washed and sanctified, and they will be resurrected. As a result, what Christians do with their bodies is significant (1 Cor. 6).
    - b. Paul argues that the resurrection underscores God's concern for what is done with the body in this life.
    - c. Paul pleads with the Corinthians to remember Israel and not to fall into idolatrous, evil desires (1 Cor. 10:1–13).
  4. Holiness is to be an attribute that marks the church.
    - a. Holiness is our constant striving after a God-honoring way of life.
    - b. Holiness is an essential part of the church, and that is why so many aspects of the church reinforce our need to be holy.
- B. The church is to be united.
  1. Christians are supposed to be separated from the world, not from each other, because unity is a distinguishing mark of the church (1 Cor. 3:1–4).
  2. Unity gives testimony to the truth of the gospel.
    - a. Unity transcended the division between Jew and Gentile, and every worldly division is to be transcended by the unity found in Christ.
    - b. Paul is especially distraught to see division during the Lord's Supper, a feast of unity (1 Cor. 11:17–34).
- C. The church is to be loving.
  1. First Corinthians 8–14 is a long excursus on the topic of love, dealing with showing consideration toward others, because love is how Christians are unified.
  2. Love builds up the church (1 Cor. 8:1).
    - a. Paul's principle of love: "Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor" (1 Cor. 10:24).
    - b. Paul speaks of love as the most excellent way because it edifies the church.
  3. Love determines how the church is to function.
    - a. Paul prioritizes prophecy over tongues, because prophecy edifies the church, and the most loving way to exercise gifts in the church is for the edification of others.
    - b. Paul's practical application of love in 1 Corinthians 14 makes it as definitive of a chapter on love as 1 Corinthians 13.

4. Paul loved the church.
  - a. Paul truly experienced the grace of God, calling himself “the least of the apostles” (1 Cor. 15:9) because he had persecuted the church.
  - b. It is only fitting that it is Paul who urges the Corinthians to love one another and to do all things for the edification of the church.
- D. Why should the church be holy, united, and loving?
  1. The church must be holy because God is holy.
    - a. Paul exhorts, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1).
    - b. Imitating Christ makes us different from the world; in Christ, God has set us apart (1 Cor. 1:2).
    - c. The wisdom of God is not the wisdom of the world, and God’s wisdom is the gospel, which is foolishness to the world (1 Cor. 2:12, 3:19).
    - d. We are strange to the world because the world is estranged from God, so if we are going to belong to God, we will be like God.
    - e. God has bought us and indwelt us, so we must be holy to reflect His holiness (1 Cor. 6:19–20).
  2. The church must be united because God is One.
    - a. Paul reminded the Corinthians that the work of the church is all the work of God (1 Cor. 3:4–9).
    - b. The one foundation of the church is Jesus Christ.
    - c. Disunity tells a lie about God.
  3. The church must be loving because God is loving.
    - a. Love for God must be at the center of our hearts as a response to His tremendous love for us.
    - b. God took the initiative to redeem the church, so the church must reflect God’s love to a dying world.
- E. What is the church?
  1. The church is a congregation associated by covenant to the faith and fellowship of the gospel that observes the ordinances of Christ.
  2. The church is governed by Christ’s laws—exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges in them, as expressed in His Word—in which there are two offices: elder and deacon.
  3. The church is the means by which we are called to display God’s glorious character to His creation, by living for Him with a life of holiness, unity, and love.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The resurrection of the body has significant implications for our holiness and the holiness of the church.
  - a. True
  - b. False

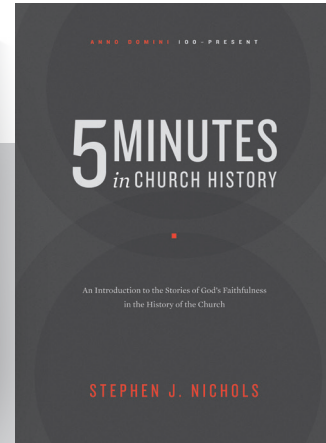
2. A church's \_\_\_\_\_ most reflects God's redeeming grace to the world.
  - a. Holiness
  - b. Unity
  - c. Love
  - d. All of the above
3. Paul demonstrates how God has always desired His people to be holy by citing \_\_\_\_\_ when addressing the sexual immorality in Corinth.
  - a. Genesis
  - b. Deuteronomy
  - c. Ecclesiastes
  - d. Proverbs
4. Paul placed tongues over prophecy as the most loving expression of spiritual gifts at Corinth.
  - a. True
  - b. False
5. Paul argues for unity using the analogy of the \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Body
  - b. Spirit
  - c. Cross
  - d. Temple
6. Paul argues for holiness using the analogy of the \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Body
  - b. Spirit
  - c. Cross
  - d. Temple

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the different ways Paul argues that the church must be holy? Which do you find most compelling?
2. How does Paul's discussion of spiritual gifts relate to love?
3. What is the greatest problem caused by church disunity?
4. In what ways can you strive toward holiness, unity, and love in your local church?



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