

## Preparing to Move & Find a New Church

Membership in a local church is one of life's most important decisions. Church membership provides the nurturing care of a congregation and a context for every member to become a mature and ministering worshipper of God. In short, the church you join will either help or hinder your delight in the supremacy of Jesus Christ.

Given the weightiness of this decision, how does a person go about finding a church to join? Here are a few suggestions to help you carefully navigate this process.

### **Leave Well**

Before leaving and looking for another church, make sure that you depart from your current church in a way honoring to Christ and edifying to the body. Spend time reflecting on God's grace to you through the covenant members of Restoration Church (or whatever church of which you are currently a member). As you reflect, express thankfulness to God for his kindness to you through this particular body.

Capitalize on this time to encourage others. Even as you leave, celebrate God's grace, knowing that what is celebrated gets repeated. Tell others how you have been encouraged by their walk with Christ and spur them on in good deeds.

Further, if there's any unresolved conflict, be it with a pastor or fellow church member, do not leave without joyfully obeying our Lord Jesus who tells us to be reconciled to one-another before worshipping (cf. Matthew 5:24; Romans 12:18). Strive to build the unity of the body even as you move on to another church family.

Now that you're prepared to leave well, let's turn our attention to finding another church to call home. While the steps below are on the practical side, it's important to point out this process is not mechanical. Looking for a church should be bathed in prayer and discussed in community with those you trust.

### **Look for the Essentials**

When looking for a church in which to become meaningfully involved, it's important that you emphasize what Scripture emphasizes. In other words, don't let personal preferences become the determining factor. Keep your priorities straight by differentiating between essentials, convictions, and preferences. You can think along these terms:

- Essentials are worth dying for.
- Convictions are worth debating – some more strongly than others.
- Preferences can be discussed, but it's a matter of personal choice.

Essentials are those beliefs that determine whether or not an entity is a church. Or to say it another way, an essential is any truth that if denied or misrepresented compromises the truth of the gospel. This category includes inspiration and authority of the Bible, the triune nature of God, the deity of Christ, the depravity of humanity, and salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus alone.

To see what a church believes about these things, find their Statement of Faith and ensure what is affirmed is true to historic, orthodox Christianity. A tangible way to do this is to compare Restoration Church's statement of beliefs to what you find at another church. Further, as we discuss below, it's important to discern that a church not only affirms the essentials of the faith, but also strives to joyfully live in light of these truths.

## **Give Proper Weight to Convictions**

After affirming a church's essential beliefs, you can move on to examine how your biblically informed convictions align with this particular church's convictions, both in profession and practice. As you do this, realize that, unlike essentials, not all convictions must carry the same weight. Some convictions should likely hold more sway than others in determining if you should join a specific church.

Some convictions are deeply and directly tied to your spiritual growth, whereas others are not as determinative in fostering maturity in Christ. For example, we believe that a right view of Scripture (an essential) should lead to the regular practice of expositional preaching (a conviction). So while the absence of expositional preaching does not necessarily nullify the nature of a church, we believe, that in time the church's overall health will be compromised. However, there are other convictions, such as eschatological (i.e. end time) views, that do not necessarily and directly impact a person's growth in Christ as part of that body.

The number and range of biblical convictions is about as varied as there are persons and churches. Of all the convictions a church can profess and practice, we suggest the following should carry significant weight:

- Expository preaching (that is, the point of the passage is the point of the sermon)
- Meaningful membership (including restorative church discipline)
- Believer's baptism (that is, baptism is reserved for those professing faith in Christ)
- Biblical church leadership (specifically, being led by godly, qualified men)
- Proper understanding of marriage, sexuality and gender

We believe that these convictions should heavily inform your decision in finding a church. However, we also recognize there are healthy churches that may have differing convictions and practices. For example, a faithful gospel church may affirm and practice most of the above yet differ in regards to baptism (i.e. hold to infant baptism). Therefore, if there are no churches that align with your most significant convictions, you can still be a faithful, maturing member in a church that differs on some of these issues. Wisdom must be used in determining how firmly to hold to each conviction.

## **Evaluate Preaching & Practice**

God's preached word is the fountain from which all health flows for a body of Christ. You'll grow most where God's word is given the highest authority and priority in a church's life. Therefore, you'll want to pay particular attention to the preaching at a given church.

By God's providence, we find ourselves in a time and place where most churches provide easy access to their weekly sermons. You would be well served to look at what's been recently preached (e.g. does it appear topical or expositional?) and then listen to a couple of sermons. As you listen, you'll want to ask questions like: Is the preaching faithful to Scripture? Is the point of the message the point of the passage? Did I hear the good news of Jesus Christ? Am I personally challenged?

As you visit a church, you'll want to determine, as much as possible, that not only is the gospel affirmed and clearly preached, but also that it's faithfully and humbly lived out. You'll want to discern that this a church where you will both be served and be able to joyfully serve in the context of meaningful relationships bound together in Christ. You can ask questions like:

- Does it appear the church expects and equips its members to grow spiritually?
- Does the church encourage members to disciple one another?
- Does the church heartily welcome non-Christians and have a burden to advance the gospel to those who do not yet trust Christ?

- What picture will my children and/or friends see in this church - something distinct or something a lot like the world?
- Would I be happy to invite non-Christians to this church?
- Will the church's physical location, including both Sunday gatherings and weekly groups, encourage or discourage meaningful involvement?

Visiting a church and asking these types of questions will go a long way in helping you find a church where you can grow in Christ and help others do the same.

### **Don't Compare, Do Commit & Serve**

As you evaluate a church, try hard to not to compare churches. Just as the local church is one body with many diverse members, so it is with the universal body of Christ. The goal is not for every local church to be uniform in all that it does. Given the specific contexts, leadership, and members of a local church, you should expect each church to be a bit different.

When you first showed up at Restoration Church, relationships were just developing, and you probably had questions as well as hesitations about various aspects of our ministry. But as you got to know people – in all their sinfulness and strangeness – God started to knit your heart together with other brothers and sisters and you began to more fully understand the overall mission and philosophy of Restoration Church. This process took time. Therefore, it's not helpful to compare the depth of your relationships at Restoration Church or your "buy-in" to Restoration Church, where you've been for a while, with another church that's not as familiar to you.

On the other side, it's also not helpful to compare those aspects of Restoration Church that perhaps you thought not as favorable with another church that appears more likeable in a specific area. You want your driving motivation in joining a church to be based on the gospel essentials and weighty convictions and not based on a desire to satisfy personal preferences left unmet at Restoration.

All this to say, be careful of giving too much weight to personal preferences. No church is perfect; and it's likely that no one church will meet every preference and desire you have. That's okay because church is not ultimately about you. Narrowly focusing on personal preferences places an unhealthy emphasis on self. We must remember, the local church does not exist just to meet our needs; it exists to magnify Christ Jesus, who in turn will satisfy our deepest desires. Therefore, look for a church that is faithful to God's word and strives to help its members joyfully live out the gospel in all of life. Don't just look for a church where you can be served, but rather find a church – even if it's does not meet all your preferences – where you can serve. Then, by God's grace, commit to doing so.

Hopefully, you're leaving Restoration Church as a more mature Christian than when you first arrived. One of our goals is to have Ephesians 4 played out in every member's life – "to equip the saints for the work of ministry building up the body of Christ...when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love." You are one of the saints. You are a body part that when working properly builds up the local church body. And just as you have done that at Restoration, you now get to take your giftings and abilities to serve and strengthen another church. As you do this, you too will be built up in the gospel of our Lord.

### **Church Searches**

Here are a few online church directories. Many of these churches will be like-minded to Restoration Church; however, it's still important to evaluate each church along the suggestions given above.

- [Treasuring Christ Together](#)
- [9Marks](#)
- [The Gospel Coalition](#)