

Church Planters Corner**Keys and Issues in Planting the Local Church**

What are the Marks of an unbiblical Church?

by Missionary David R. Cox

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See also

David Cox - [Marks of a False Prophet](#)

David Cox - [Marks of a Biblical Church](#) (Read this first before reading this present page)

David Cox - [Marks of a unbiblical Church?](#)

David Cox - [Before you Join a Church](#)

Introduction

Whereas a good church is a pretty focused thing, a bad or unbiblical church can take many different forms. Because of this we need to divide our study into areas. First of all, we need to separate what would be a "church" from a sects, cult, or false religion. Although really there is not much difference between them, I would consider a "church" that would identify itself with solid biblical doctrine something different from a cult. Some "Fundamental" or "Baptist" churches would officially hold to correct or biblical doctrine, but actually practice or secretly believe in unbiblical things. There may also be some groups that would do things as a biblical church would do them, but they hold tightly to some doctrine that is not biblical. Usually these groups always have some defective concept concerning salvation. So these characteristics are a composite of a whole bunch of bad and erroneous churches, sects, abusive churches, groups, etc.

The list of marks of a bad church on this page therefore should be understand as a bad church can have this or that characteristic or mark, but it is defined as bad by any one, and not necessarily by all. Also let me add that some good churches are good on most things, and they may fall into one or more of these marks of a bad church. I do not pretend to know all churches, all situations, and how a person should act or the decision a person should take in such cases. I think soul searching your own heart in order to find what God wants you to do is most important in any situation, and it is essential in these cases. See my thoughts on [Getting out of a Bad Church](#).

Abusive Churches

Perhaps I should comment on the idea of an "abusive church". An abusive church is a church that perhaps has orthodox doctrine but has practices and conduct that is not biblical, un-Christlike. Most commonly abusive churches are seen by their refusal to believe in and practice [Christian liberty](#). In order for these people to control the brethren in a way that is advantageous for them, they also use unscriptural church discipline. By this I mean that they use tactics like public shame over issues that they do not have strong scriptural basis for, and they do it in an unscriptural way.

Let me digress with an example. For example, a pastor says that his members have to attend ALL church functions, and can only miss if they ask their pastor for permission first, and he grants it. A valid reason is that you are sick and dying in a hospital. Family reunions out of town, visiting another church, etc. are all invalid. The person ignores this imposed asking-permission structure, so the pastor now publicly says embarrassing things about the family, revealing private matters or joking in such a way as to cause the family shame, embarrassment, or discomfort on some level. Perhaps he removes the man from the deacon board suddenly, or removes either husband or wife from responsibilities or service in the church, because the pastor "has doubts". The point is to use press to cause wayward members to tow the line. This psychological pressure is what makes them abusive. (Here I would exclude members who are serving, but the pastor or leadership removes them because of serious problems, such as marital separation, infidelity, or drinking/drug/sex problems. Also doctrinal heresy that comes to light would be a legitimate reason for removal.)

Cults, sects, and false religions.

Let's just define these for clarity. A church has to at least have a clear, scriptural plan of salvation. If the group, church, or principal leaders have doctrinal error on the doctrine of salvation, then it is a false religion. Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Catholics, etc. are all false religions because they either do not believe in Jesus Christ as the unique and singular savior of souls, or because they add works to salvation. That correct, orthodox view of salvation has to be a key principle focus of the church to even begin to consider it as a good church.

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Moreover there are churches that seem to have "lost their way" as far as the spiritual fight we are in, and they have taken the Don Quixote position of attacking windmills instead of the enemy. There is a saying that is an excellent guide here. *"Major on majors, and minor on minors."* Salvation, holiness, evangelism, service, these types of things are majors. A church that minors on things that are not really very important, but they make them important because of some driving obsession with proving their point on minor matters is simply a bad church. At times this becomes difficult to discern the line. I believe it is very, or rather extremely important to stress the authority of God's word, and to uphold and defend the inspiration of Scriptures. In my book, churches that think that holding up a KJV Bible answers all of that is just off base. Why? Because issues of importance WILL ALWAYS WITHOUT EXCEPTION HAVE A FOUNDATION IN SCRIPTURES, EXPOSITING KEY VERSES.

In this KJV only controversy, I fail to read in anybody's writings what Scripture in my KJV Bible (yes I use only a KJV in English, and RV60 in Spanish) where it says, "Thus saith the Lord, thou shalt only use the KJV." I read the preface to the reader from the translators, and they clearly refused a "reinspiration" of their work as being the end all of English Bible translations. They mention specifically that their work will need revision in the future. I never see Paul, Peter, John, nor Moses even hinting that they may have errors in their writings and work. My KJV Bible does not even hint at a "Majority Manuscript."

Moreover I also see distinct cultic tendency in squashing the liberty of the believer on matters that the Bible has not clearly taken a position. What is not clearly dictated in Scripture, be extremely careful, cautious, and respect other good Christian men's differing views.

