

Consumer guides are often very helpful in aiding the consumer with getting things done by giving helpful advice or suggestions. And I'm sure that the folks who wrote the articles in the "Consumer How To Guide" in a recent edition of our local newspaper were sincere in their desire to help others. However, sometimes without knowing it, we can do more harm than good if we're not careful. The article entitled "How To Choose A Church" is such a case. Despite some good suggestions, the author of that article missed the mark on several points.

First let me say that I'm not sure that suggestions on how to choose a church should be placed alongside or on the same level as "How to Choose a Lawnmower", "How to Choose a Realtor" and "How to Choose a Retirement Community". Although all those choices are important to folks, surely the eternal outcome and end results of choosing a church far outweigh those of making choices of worldly concerns.

How, then, should one go about choosing a church to attend? According to the article in the guide, I should choose a church where the theology is similar to my own. Really? Since when should my theology take precedence over what pleases God? In fact, Jesus said, "And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." (Matt. 15:9). My personal theology, if it disagrees with God's Word is absolutely and eternally useless.

Another suggestion given was to choose a church who's 'pastor' holds a post-graduate degree from an accredited seminary. Really? I wonder how many gospel preachers would disagree with that one. Is a preacher's education more important than his preaching the truth of God's Word? Paul spoke of those who were, "always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." (2 Tim. 3:7). Many well educated, so called 'preachers' regularly teach and preach false doctrines that they've learned in "institutes of higher learning". Finding a preacher that preaches God's truths will do us far more good. In addition to that, the use of the term "pastor" to refer to a preacher is not scripturally correct. A "pastor" according to the New Testament use of the word, is an 'elder', a 'shepherd', one who is to 'oversee' the flock or congregation. The word 'pastor' has been totally mis-used within denominations for decades. The preacher is a messenger of God's word. He is a teacher, but he is not an 'elder', or a 'shepherd', or an 'overseer' unless he occupies that office as described in the Timothy and Titus letters of the New Testament, in addition to being a preacher. A simple study of the Greek will verify this. (One would think that most preachers holding a post-graduate degree would know this).

Toward the end of the article the writer suggests that most churches are "top heavy" with older members. That is correct, but have you ever wondered why that is? Can it be that for the past two generations or so, we have taught our children that it's perfectly right to choose a church that suits them? We've made it clear that if they can't find a church that 'fits', then it's alright to just not go at all. It's no wonder that too many of our young people are not attending worship services any more. When we put worshipping God, choosing a church, and such spiritual things on the same level as choosing a lawnmower, a realtor or a retirement community, what else are we teaching our children. No, I'm not faulting the author of the article in the Consumer How To Guide, I'm saying that we as a people have placed far too much emphasis on "self" and not enough emphasis on God for far too long, so that it has become a habit we don't even realize we have. We need to get back to the idea that "It's God's way or it's the wrong way". It's what suits Him best that really matters... eternally. More on the church that pleases God next week.