

9 Marks of a Healthy Church Summary From Mark Dever's Website

<http://www.9marks.org/what-are-the-9marks/>

1) Preaching

What is it?

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

Where is it in the Bible?

- According to Scripture, God accomplishes what he wants to accomplish through speaking (see [Gen. 1:3](#), [Isa. 55:10-11](#), [Acts 12:24](#)). This means that if preachers want their sermons to be filled with God's power, they must preach what God says.
- The Bible has many examples of this kind of preaching and teaching: Levitical priests taught the law ([Deut. 33:10](#)), Ezra and the Levites read from the law and gave the sense of it ([Neh. 8:8](#)), and Peter and the apostles expounded Scripture and urged their hearers to respond with repentance and faith ([Acts 2:14-41](#), [13:16-47](#)).
- On the other hand, God condemns those who "speak of their own imagination, not from the mouth of the Lord" ([Jer. 23:16](#), [18](#), [21-22](#)).

Why is it important?

Expositional 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](#); [Jn. 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

What is it?

Biblical theology is sound doctrine; it is right thoughts about God; it is belief that accords with Scripture.

Where is it in the Bible?

1. The entire Bible teaches sound doctrine.
2. Many New Testament books, such as Paul's epistles to the Romans and Ephesians, are stuffed to the brim with rich doctrinal teaching (see [Rom. 1-11](#) and [Eph. 1-3](#)).
3. The authors of the New Testament frequently argue that sound doctrine is essential for healthy Christians and healthy churches (see [1 Tim. 1:5](#), [2 John 1-6](#), and [Titus 2:1-10](#)).

Why is it important?

Biblical theology is essential for

1. **Evangelism.** The gospel *is* doctrine. Therefore, sound doctrine is necessary for evangelism.

2. **Discipleship.** Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth” ([Jn. 17:17](#)). Christians grow by learning and living in light of the truth—in other words, by *sound doctrine*.
3. **Unity.** According to the New Testament, the only true unity is unity in the truth ([1 Jn. 1:1-4](#); [2 Jn. 10-11](#)).
4. **Worship.** To worship God is to declare his excellencies ([1 Pet. 2:9-10](#)) and to exalt him because of who he is ([Ps. 29:2](#)). True worship is a *response* to sound doctrine.

3) The Gospel

What is it?

The good news is that:

- The one and only God who is holy made us in his image to know him ([Gen. 1:26-28](#)).
- But we sinned and cut ourselves off from him ([Gen. 3](#); [Rom. 3:23](#)).
- 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](#)).
- 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](#)).
- 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](#)).
- 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](#)).

Where is it in the Bible?

Romans 1-4 contains one of the fullest expositions of the gospel in all of Scripture, and [1 Corinthians 15:1-4](#) contains a succinct summary of the gospel.

Why is it important?

- 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.

4) Conversion

What is it?

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

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

And in conversion, people

- repent of sin ([Mk. 1:15](#); [Acts 3:19](#))
- and believe in Jesus ([Jn. 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.

Where is it in the Bible?

- Jesus called people to repent and believe in him ([Mk. 1:15](#)). He said that unless someone is born again he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven ([Jn. 3:1-8](#)).
- Throughout the book of Acts, the apostles call people to turn from their sin and trust in Christ ([Acts 2:38,3:19-20, 10:43, 13:38-39, 16:31, 17:30](#)).
- Many of the epistles describe both our need to repent and believe in Christ and God's supernatural work to accomplish this ([Rom. 6:1-23](#); [1 Cor. 2:14-15](#); [2 Cor. 4:3-6](#); [Eph. 2:1-10](#); [1 Thess. 1:9-10](#); [2 Tim. 2:25-26](#)).

Why is it important?

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,
 - 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) Evangelism

What is it?

Evangelism is simply telling non-Christians the good news about what Jesus Christ has done to save sinners. 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.

Where is it in the Bible?

Scripture contains both teaching on evangelism ([Matt. 28:19-20](#); [Rom. 10:14-17](#); [1 Pet. 3:15-16](#)) and examples of evangelistic preaching (see [Acts 2:14-41](#), [3:12-26](#), [13:16-49](#), [17:22-31](#)). Moreover, any time Scripture speaks of the gospel, it is teaching us what we are to share in evangelism (see, for example, Romans 1-4 and [1 Corinthians 15:1-4](#)).

Why is it important?

- 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) Membership

What is it?

According to the Bible, church membership is a commitment every Christian should make to attend, love, serve, and submit to a local church.

Where is it in the Bible?

- Throughout Old Testament history, God made a clear distinction between his people and the world (see [Lev. 13:46](#), [Num. 5:3](#), [Deut. 7:3](#)).
- Christ says that entering the kingdom of God means being bound to the church "on earth" ([Matt. 16:16-19](#); [18:17-19](#)). Where do we see the church on earth? The local church.
- The New Testament explicitly refers to some people being *inside* the church and some people being *outside* ([1 Cor. 5:12-13](#)). This is much more than a casual association.
- The church in Corinth consisted of a definite number of believers, such that Paul could speak of a punishment inflicted by the majority ([2 Cor. 2:6](#)).

- Not only does the New Testament speak of the reality of church membership, but its dozens of “one anothers” are written to local churches, which fill out our understanding of what church membership should practically look like.

7) Discipline

Why is it important?

Biblical church membership is important because the church presents God’s witness to 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.

What is it?

- 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 (see [Matt. 18:15-20](#), [1 Cor. 5:1-13](#)).

Where is it in the Bible?

- The New Testament commands corrective discipline (excluding unrepentant sinners from the fellowship of the church) in passages like [Matthew 18:15-17](#), [1 Corinthians 5:1-13](#), [2 Corinthians 2:6](#), and [2 Thessalonians 3:6-15](#).
- The New Testament speaks about formative discipline (our efforts to grow in holiness together) in countless passages about pursuing holiness and building one another up in the faith, such as [Ephesians 4:11-32](#) and [Philippians 2:1-18](#).

Why is it important?

Think of discipline as the stake that helps the tree grow upright, the extra set of wheels on the bicycle, or the musician’s endless hours of practice. 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) Discipleship

What is it?

Scripture teaches that a live 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.

Where is it in the Bible?

- Peter exhorted his readers to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ ([2 Pet. 3:18](#))
- Paul exhorted the Ephesians to grow by speaking the truth in love to one another ([Eph. 4:15](#)).

- Many passages in Scripture instruct us to imitate godly leaders ([Phil. 4:9](#); [Heb. 13:7](#)).

The point is that, according to Scripture, all Christians should grow in Christ, imitate other godly Christians, and encourage others in their growth in Christlikeness.

Why is it important?

1. Promoting 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.
2. 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.
3. A church that is not growing in the faith will ultimately yield an unhealthy witness to the world.

9) Leadership

What is it?

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

Where is it in the Bible?

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](#).

Why is it important?

God gifts churches with elders to

- feed God's sheep God's word ([Jn. 21:15-17](#)),
- guide the sheep ([1 Tim. 4:16](#); [1 Pet. 5:3](#), [Heb. 13:7](#)),
- and protect the sheep from attackers ([Acts 20:27-29](#); [2 Tim. 4:3-4](#); [Tit. 1:9](#)),
- 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.

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