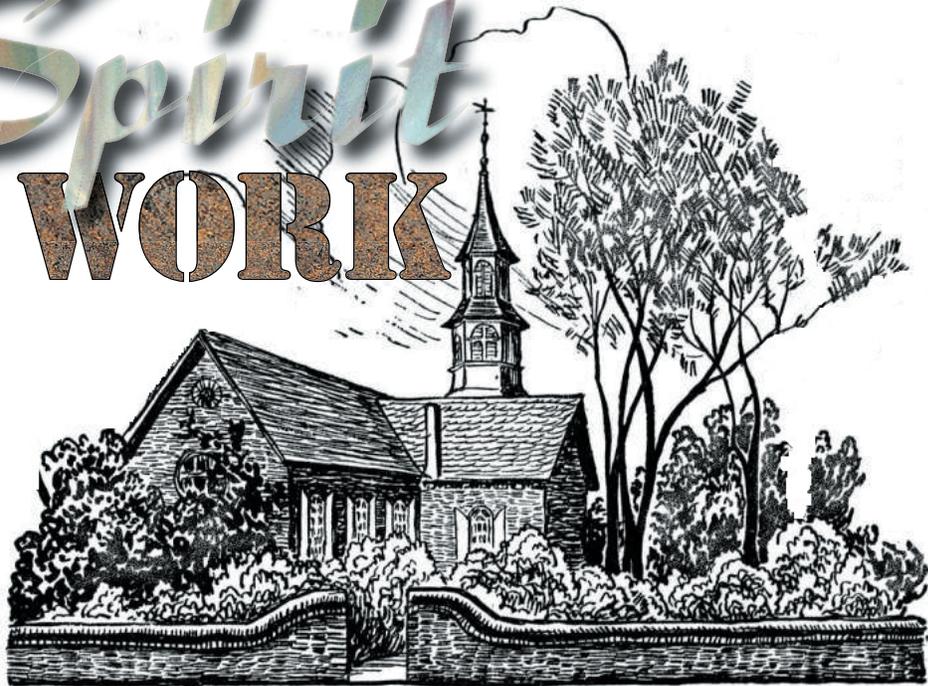


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Many Christians select a church home the way some people select art for their living room.

Spirit WORK



long time ago, in a land far away, Linda and I visited one of those ubiquitous traveling “art” sales held in a local rented hall. “NO PAINTING OVER \$49.95!” the TV ad had screamed. Freshly wed and poor, for two kids just starting out the event sounded like a perfect opportunity to inaugurate the decoration of their first house. As advertised, the spacious hall was brimming with paintings of all styles, shapes and prices—but “NONE OVER \$49.95!”

Did we peruse the selection with an eye toward investment? technical quality of the

execution? artistic mastery of the painter? quality of the frame? a mystical connection between the piece of art and our souls?

No, we were looking for something that would go with the color of our living room furniture. Oh yes—and anything within our rather paltry budget.

We *did* find a painting that met our limited criteria—it was green, as I recall—and for a few years it graced the walls of our living room and, later, our bedroom. Today that painting is buried in an anonymous box somewhere out in our garage. I can’t even remember the subject matter—only that it was green.

Criteria

Some people select a church for its location: it is close to their home. Some select a church because it is popular, favoring the multi-thousand member mega-church over

the tiny neighborhood parish—while some select it for just the opposite reason. Some people join a church where their friends attend, or where there are children their own children’s age. Others revel in the grand architecture, or the vaunted reputation of the senior pastor. Some just like the fact that the pews are padded, and that the preacher ends his sermon in time for noon pot roast.

Worship style is a critical factor for many. Are the “old” hymns still sung (preferably from an actual hymnal), or does the congregation sing simple choruses projected on the wall? Is the Call to Worship reverent or jubilant? high church or low? Is there the speaking in tongues? ecstasies? lifting of hands? Is there a choir? a “praise band?”

Are the people friendly—but not *too* friendly? Are there youth programs? missions? the appropriate amount and kind of fellowship?

Choosing

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

(Ephesians 2:19-22)

After more than five years of worshiping at home, because we have been taking care of my mother, Linda and I are just beginning the process of finding a new church home. It would be dishonest for us to say that none of the foregoing is entertained in our minds as we visit churches in our area.

The traditions with which we are most familiar and comfortable are well-defined: conservative evangelical; substance over flash. We will admit that some styles of worship in vogue today are repellent to us, standing in the way of our worship, rather than encouraging it. But these temporal considerations cannot be the basis by which we "choose" a church home.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will...

(Ephesians 1:3-5)

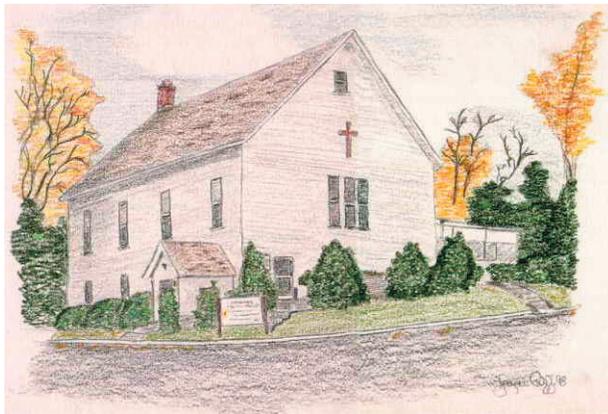
When you really get down to it, there is very little personal, human choice involved in our relationship with God. In Christ we

were selected out—by God Himself—to be part of His family: the church. And the only way to "choose" the right church home for worship, service, and fellowship is to let God Himself—through the ministry of the Spirit—do the choosing.

But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

(1 Samuel 16:7)

Just as man is incapable of accurately judging the heart of another, he is incapable, on his own, of knowing his place in the vast and mysterious organism that is God's family. For God to be glorified—the ultimate



purpose of man's existence—God must be permitted to rule. The Spirit must be the one who fits together the many and varied stones that comprise the holy building that is the church.

Is the doctrine of the local church sound? It matters. Is the word of God faithfully and accurately preached? It matters.

Does the local church sing from hymnals or from words projected on a wall? It doesn't matter. Is the church within walking distance or is it miles away? It doesn't matter. Does the pastor wear a suit and tie, or t-shirt and sandals? It doesn't matter. Is there a choir or a praise band? It doesn't matter.

Is this the local church you are to join? Only the Spirit will tell you.

*When we walk with the Lord
In the light of His Word
What a glory He sheds on our way!
While we do His good will
He abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and obey.*

*Not a shadow can rise,
Not a cloud in the skies,
But His smile quickly drives it away;
Not a doubt nor a fear,
Not a sigh nor a tear,
Can abide while we trust and obey.*

*But we never can prove
The delights of His love
Until all on the altar we lay;
For the favor He shows,
And the joy He bestows,
Are for them who will trust and obey.*

*Then in fellowship sweet
We will sit at His feet,
Or we'll walk by His side in the way;
What He says we will do,
Where He sends we will go—
Never fear, only trust and obey.*

*Trust and obey, for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus,
But to trust and obey.*

(John H. Sammis)