



Books in Review

NINE MARKS OF A HEALTHY CHURCH

by Mark Dever

Crossway Books, 287 pages, \$15.99

In evaluating aberrational persuasions such as liberal, seeker-sensitive, and emerging churches, the attention often centers on the negative aspects of these groups. Mark Dever's volume, on the other hand, targets the characteristics of a sound biblical church. And while it is important to know what makes for an unhealthy church, it is even more essential to know what makes for a healthy church. As such, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* is a book that every Christian needs to read.

Dever states at the beginning of his work that although he proposes nine marks, there can certainly be more marks of a healthy church. The nine marks that Dever addresses are Expository Preaching, Biblical Theology, The Gospel, A Biblical Understanding of Conversion, A Biblical Understanding of Evangelism, A Biblical Understanding of Church Membership, Biblical Church Discipline, A Concern for Discipleship and Growth, and Biblical Church Leadership. Each one of these chapters is important.

Expository preaching, Dever tells us, is one of the most important marks of a healthy church, as it increases trust in the inspiration, inerrancy, and sufficiency of the Word of God. Moreover, expository preaching is a powerful antidote to false teachings. A biblically sound theology will help the believer to formulate a proper worldview.

From there Dever moves to a definition of the Gospel — telling us what it is, and what it isn't. While this may seem trivial, it is amazing just how distorted the pronouncement of the Gospel has become in so many churches today. Many churches also suffer from a flawed understanding of conversion, which encapsulates that which is true repentance, resulting in a change in the old nature and a putting on of the new.

Two more links in Dever's chain for a healthy church are evangelism and local church membership. Here

again, both are vital; evangelism "is following Christ's agenda, giving out the news about Him," and membership is important because it shows a step toward commitment as well as a desire for accountability.

One of the most important chapters is the one on church discipline. This is a biblical mandate that we hear little about in the church today and the local church suffers because it is not taught and practiced. One reason is because discipline takes a lot of work. We need to have discipline, not only in our personal lives, but just as importantly, in the life of our church. Dever stresses, "God Himself disciplines us and, as we will see, He commands us to do the same for each other. The local church congregation has a special responsibility and a special competence in this regard" (pg. 174). Those who join a local church need to be told that the church will be there to help them in their walk with God and that can mean disciplining them — for restorative purposes — if needed.

Discipleship toward growth and maturity in the faith is another mark that we generally don't see much of in the church today. This, like discipline, takes a lot of time and effort to accomplish. The church tends to get lazier and lazier. We think we don't have "time" to disciple or to help the church to grow, but, as Dever points out, "A healthy church is characterized by a serious concern for spiritual growth on the part of its members. In a healthy church, people want to get better at following Jesus Christ" (pg. 198).

Finally, Dever proffers biblical church leadership, which he defines as members guiding and directing the local church in the way that is pleasing to God.

Each of the "nine marks" chapters start with a preview page of "What's Coming Up" to whet the reader's appetite. The book also has three very helpful appendices, along with general and scriptural indexes.

We need to remember that there is no perfect church, but that does not mean that we can't strive to do what God wants us to do. We should also keep in mind that the church is to change the world and the world is not to change the church. This means that the church that truly stands for God is a healthy church. Dever's is a much needed volume. We can highly recommend *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* to others.

—MG

Editor's Note: The publications featured in PFO's *Books in Review* section are available from **Personal Freedom Outreach** (P.O. Box 26062, Saint Louis, Missouri 63136). Please add \$2.50 to the price listed for shipping and handling. Due to occasional price changes by the publishers, the retail amounts listed are subject to change without notice. These publications are also available to those who help to financially support the work of PFO. Please see our funds appeal flyer for details.