

Lesson 7: Core Values – Love the Local Church

Opening:

It has happened to all of us I would imagine at some point. You are standing in line at the coffee shop or sandwich shop to order your lunch, but the line doesn't seem to move. We can't help it, we glance toward the front of the line only to find that the person in the front cannot seem to make up their mind about what they want. The menu isn't complicated, but still they wait, they study, they ask questions. Meanwhile you resolve to the fact that you have to muster an outward smile while you inwardly fume. You are left asking yourself, "How could someone take something that seems so simple and make it this complicated?"

We could ask that same question about the local church. Jesus promises that if we confess and grow in our understanding of the simple gospel declaration that He is the Christ, then we (the church) hold the very keys to the kingdom of God (the very real truth that sets people free from sin and death and brings them into a life of joy and peace). (See Matthew 16:13-19)

Thom Rainer notes that the purpose of a church is to "partner with God around the purpose of spiritual transformation." That's it. The whole purpose of the church is to engage in a partnership with God and with one another, so that we and the world around us might be spiritually transformed into the image of Christ.

Central Truths:

- A church is to "partner with God around the purpose of spiritual transformation."
- The local church must love itself.
- The local church must reach beyond itself.

Core Values: Love the Local Church

The core value that we want to discuss this week is loving the local church. When we talk about loving the local church we must first define what we mean by "local church." The local church is a group of people who have been called out by God to worship Him, love one another, and build one another up in the faith; and a group of people who have been sent into the world to witness and serve for the glory of God. Therefore a healthy local church has two distinctive marks: 1) people are growing in the knowledge of God and love for other believers; 2)

people are reaching beyond themselves to serve and share the gospel with those God brings into their lives.

Read the following passages and answer this question: “What does this text tell us about what it means to be the church?”

John 17:20-23 _____

Romans 15:1-7 _____

Ephesians 4:1-6 _____

Ephesians 4:25-32 _____

Loving the local church is important. When we fail to love one another, we grieve the Spirit, interrupt spiritual growth, and detract from the local church being a witness to the community.

Examining the Text:

Matthew 5:14-16

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

The local church should be outwardly focused. Look at VV. 14-15 It is fascinating that here in what is known as the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus begins His explanation of the church by pointing out that they are “light” for the “world.” When Jesus calls the church “light” He reminds us of how we have been blessed through His gracious love for us; and He reminds us of our responsibility to the world around us. The title of “light of the world” was something that Jesus claimed for Himself (John 8:12; 9:5). He empowers the local church to be a representative here on earth of the spiritual transformation that He leads us through. He reminds his followers that as representatives of Christ they have a responsibility to serve out of love for what Christ has done.

The local church should be known by good works. Look at the first part of V. 16 (*In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works*) We have already studied that we are not saved by good works, but by grace (Ephesians 2:8-9). The good works that we do should point people to Christ. Someone asked me recently how the church could develop a better public relations strategy so that people would want to attend First Baptist Church. I think we could do many good things, but the best PR strategy for the local church is church members who do good works, who love their neighbors, who brag about the grace of God, and who speak positively and excitedly about the fellowship they find with other believers in the local church. If the church membership isn't excited, how can we expect others to want to join us in the work of God going on here?

The local church should be an upwardly focused church. Look at the rest of V. 16 The goal of the church is for the community to see and give glory to God. When we keep in mind who the church is about and what it is really for, we learn how to become focused on the glory of God. We want to be beacons in the community to help people to know the glory of God. What attitudes do we have that may keep those around us who don't know Christ from glorifying God and coming to Him for salvation? What are some ways that we as a group could become better beacons of God's glory?

Applying the Text:

- How could our attitudes toward the church be more unifying around our purpose of Loving God, serving others, and equipping disciple-makers? (Read Ephesians 4:1-3 again) What personal or corporate attitudes keep us from this unity? Ask God in prayer to tear down the walls of disunity that may be in your own heart.
- Do you think that church members are less committed to their church today? Why? What does Philippians 2:5-8 teach us about commitment to the local church?
- When God gets the glory, we can rejoice. The local church ought to be a place of joy. (Read Philippians 4:4-7) How can you as a group begin to be more joyous? Pray for the church to be a place and people of joy that the community around us can see.