

Love And Appreciation For The Local Church

Before finishing my article this time in our GIMI newsletter, I want to address a subject matter that has been heavily on my heart for the past few years. Please remember that I am in my 50th year as a full-time pastor, teacher, evangelist, and yes, missionary. I have been in scores of churches across America in at least 33 states, and in hundreds of churches in other parts of the world. Through these past few years, I have been noticing the down playing of the importance of attending and working through the ministry of the local church. I have seen this attitude by church members and church leadership, but more recently in the lives and ministries of pastors. The emphasis has been taken away from gathering together with the local assembly to instead meeting with life groups, house groups, or just simply individuals trying to serve God as a “Lone Ranger” Christian without any responsibility to or accountability by a local congregation. I am totally convinced that this is completely foreign to the New Testament Church pattern established in the Book of Acts. Therefore, this lack of love and appreciation for the local church and the lack of commitment to the beloved body of believers has led to a tremendous decline in spiritual depth, loss of evangelism, decline in world missions, and truthfully, a huge decline in funds given by God’s people to carry out the Great Commission and win the world to Christ.



Instead of having the local church family as the sending body to prepare and place God’s servants on the fields where God has called them, we now have fragmented groups with very few real God called pastors leading them, but instead we have fellowship groups teaching men’s opinions about passages of scripture rather than the man called by God standing in the pulpit preaching to the collective body of believers the inerrant Word of God as the final authority on life and all of its issues. So, we have these little fellowship groups with plenty of food and drink, a little time for a few prayers, and then maybe “his idea or concept about a certain portion of scripture”. As Dr. Ed Young in Houston, Texas said recently on one of his TV broadcast, “we have people telling how they feel about the scriptures, rather than people living their lives according to the facts of the Word of God.” So, what you believe or what I believe

about a passage from the Bible is just as important or maybe even more important than what God has actually said in His Word. Therefore, we change the scriptures to align with our sins, or maybe even give a misguided interpretation to tolerate our sins. Thus, with no genuine attachment and no commitment to the local church, then anything goes and there is no pastor, deacons, or church leader to hold people accountable. This is truly what Dietrich Boenhoffer said years ago just before Adolph Hitler hung him. Let me paraphrase, "When we allow grace to be our only basis for living, then this grace becomes a law unto its self, and this law of grace becomes a license to sin." In other words, the grace we live by becomes "cheap" grace.

During our Sunday School class here at Gateway International Baptist Church, we have been studying verse by verse through the Book of Nehemiah. In our study we have learned that after Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem and finished rebuilding the walls of the city in just 52 days, God's people in Chapter eight of the book begged for Nehemiah to have Ezra the priest bring the law of God and read it for hours upon hours in the courtyard at the Watergate. As Ezra read from the law of Moses, the people responded by weeping with broken hearts and then confessing their sins to God. This process took many hours before the people could truly get right with God and honestly praise God and say Amen! The outstanding thing about this entire solemn assembly was that the people longed to be told the truth so that they could get right with God and go on with their lives. In fact in Chapter nine, the people had to separate themselves from those who were idol worshippers and practicing pagans. The people of God in a special assembly needed the confrontation from the Word of God so that they could truly get right with God. The people didn't need a comforting Bible story to make them feel good while still living in their sins. Thus, they were presented the truth in an assembly where several thousand people were meeting together.

Now I want to say that this is what we need today. We need preachers who will stand in their pulpits before the people and love them enough to preach the truth about the sins of the people so that they can get right with God. We need church members who will recognize the importance of the solemn assembly and make church attendance and Bible study at the church assembly the priority of theirs and their children's lives. What we don't need is for church attendance to be an elective in our courses of things to do next. Sporting events and recreational activities should never be put before going to the house of

God, and any parents that allow their kids to pressure them to the point of never going to church if there was "something else" better to do, are making a catastrophic mistake. If going to church is not important to the parents, it will rarely be considered in the lives of the children and their families in the years to come. So today we go on our merry way going to church if we don't have anything else to do, and week after week we neglect Bible study and worship services just because we don't want to disappoint our children's carnal desires, or, God forbid, make those little fellows and gals mad. May God dramatically convict all of us to love and appreciate the body of believers called the church. And, may the days and months to come find a new sense of dedication and commitment to the local church for the sake of our children, our grand-children, our families, and our nation. If the church has become irrelevant, it is because we have allowed it to happen right before our very eyes. May God help us to return it to its place of enormous significance and vital importance to God, to our families, and truly for the preservation of our dying nations. Only God can make these dead bones live again! Let's put away our fickleness and get back to the simplicity of serving God through our churches. It is our churches where we should discover, develop, equip and send forth to the world leaders that love Jesus, love His church family, and take the Gospel to the world. I have never seen one cell group, one life group, or one fellowship group that has sent forth a radiant servant of God that has changed the world. But, I have seen hundreds that have been produced by the old fashion New Testament churches that fulfill their roles, lead people to Christ, disciple them, equip them for service, and then prayerfully direct them to where God is leading them. Let's pray for a return to loving our local churches and showing our appreciation for it by praying for it, attending regularly, studying the Bible together at the church, and by making it a major priority in our lives and families!

In the King's service,

Pastor Stan Frye
GIBC
Matthew 16:17-19