

Antioch Values, Part Three

- John 13:31-35
- Last week we continued our discussion of five things we are for at Antioch, five distinctives, five values, that have shaped us as followers of Jesus. We have talked about biblical worship, expository preaching, a commitment to missions, and a plurality of elders. Today we will finish with Gospel community. Or some say, "Gospel Culture." This message will be brief so we can hear a mission report from the Kentucky team later in the service.
- Francis Schaeffer spoke at a conference in Switzerland in 1974 on the topic of "Form and Freedom in the Church." He said there are four essentials to a healthy biblical church and they underscore what we have been talking about the last couple of weeks. The first is sound doctrine. Schaeffer said, "Christianity is a specific body of truth (and) on the central issues there must be no compromise." And those truths are not just to be believed but to be obeyed, to be practiced. He said, "Do you think for a moment we will have credibility if we say we believe the truth and yet *do not practice the truth in religious matters?*" The second essential he called "careful contextualization." That's a big word that simply means as believers we must think like a missionary. He said, "If Christianity is truth as the Bible claims, it must touch every aspect of life. Christianity demands that we have enough compassion to learn the questions of our generation." This is why we walked through the book "10 Questions Every Teen Should Ask *and Answer* About Christianity," this spring in a class early on Sunday mornings. The third essential Schaeffer mentioned for a healthy church is "True Spirituality." He said, "The end of the matter is to be in relationship to God." It is one thing to believe and know the right things about God, but our hearts need to be gripped by the power of the Gospel as we grow in our love for God and our humility towards one another. It is something we talk about often at Antioch, that we want to be people who truly love God with nothing more important in our lives than Him. The fourth essential Schaeffer spoke about was "Relational beauty." He said, "Lovelessness destroys orthodoxy. If we do not show beauty in the way we treat each other, then in the eyes of the world and in the eyes of our own children, we are destroying the truth we proclaim." Schaeffer summed up his talk with what he called two orthodoxies that come from these four essentials, the orthodoxy of doctrine and the orthodoxy of community. We long for those two in balance as followers of Jesus.
- One of the things I hear over and over from Christians about their church-search woes, maybe when they have moved to another city and they are looking for a church, or they have come to Antioch after sampling several other places, is this. Why can't we find a church that has both sound biblical doctrine and strong fellowship? Where is that solid Bible-embracing church that is also warm and welcoming to everyone who comes through the door, a church that is intentional about helping people find their place and build solid relationships with the family of faith? What I hear is that most of the time if they find a church that holds firm to the trustworthy Word as taught, the people there are as cold as a fish. Instead of receiving a warm welcome and an invitation into fellowship when they walk in, visitors often sit alone and try to enter into corporate worship with people who don't even acknowledge their existence. The flip side is they tell me they found a church where everyone loves each other and welcomes those gladly who come to visit, but what they are being taught and what they believe is not grounded in the Word. They are not sound in doctrine. Why can't we have both? Sound doctrine and healthy community? And I think everyone here who has been around the Word for more than a few months has already seen that not only CAN we have both, but the truth of Scripture demands it. Jesus was, as John said in his prologue, "full of grace and truth." (John 1:14) If that is true of Jesus then it is to be true of his church as well. Grace and truth. Not just truth. Not just grace. You really have neither one unless you have both. I would suggest that the church filled with the frozen chosen, no matter how much they pride themselves on *knowing* the Word, are not *practicing* it if there is no reputation there among outsiders and even among themselves that part of the reason they come together on Sunday is to love one another. Jesus said it plainly in the upper room, after Judas had left to betray him. He looked the 11 men in the eye and said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one

another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” Just to make sure they got it, and we get it, he says it three times. Love. One. Another. And that means being honest with one another, walking in the light about places where we are hurting, how we are struggling, how we might be questioning our faith, or how we may be failing in our relationship with Christ or our spouse or our children or anyone else. Ray Ortlund said, “A Bible-preaching church where no one can risk honesty is in danger of heresy.”

- I believe with every fiber of who I am that we have a Gospel community at Antioch. Not perfectly, but we have grown in that as we have grown in our love for God and in our embrace of his word. There is a Gospel culture that has matured here as we have matured in Christ. And I honestly think it is one of the most attractive features of Antioch. It often makes people want to stay if they visit a couple of times and get a taste of the sweetness of that love we have here for the Lord, His Word, *and* for each other. It even makes some people want to come back after they have been gone for a few years!
- The elders listened recently to a podcast episode by Ray Ortlund and Sam Allberry, two men who serve at Immanuel Church in Nashville. The podcast is called “You’re Not Crazy: Gospel Sanity for Young Pastors.” But they said I could listen to it, too.
- The theme of the podcast, as expressed by Sam Allberry, underscores what we have been talking about this morning. Sam said, “There should not be a disconnect between the grace of Jesus as we receive it in the Gospel, and church life.” Let’s be about the work of building our church life and our church culture around the grace God has shown to us in Jesus. Church should be something we look forward to on Sunday, certainly not something we dread or do out of duty. Allberry compares it to Rivendell: “We’ve just been stabbed on Weathertop and we find ourselves in Rivendell where we can find space and healing and help and care.” Sometimes people feel like they can’t come to church if they have messed up, or they have failed in their faith in some way. They can’t come in, they think, looking like they don’t have it all together. But what’s the truth? NONE of us has it all together! All of us stumbled and fell this week, one way or another, and Jesus is calling us to come to him. His arms are open wide to us. And so are our arms open wide to one another!
- What does the Bible say about the Gospel culture we see developing at Antioch? Look at Romans 15:5-7. “May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.” The glory of God can be seen when we welcome one another in the same way that Christ has welcomed us. Think of that. This is not, “Play well together.” Or, “Hey, be nice.” No, the question is, what has Christ done for us? He has welcomed us into his life. He has not just cancelled our debt with his blood, which is wonderful beyond imagination. He has also shown us mercy and grace and opened his arms and welcomed us as friends. In the same way, we are called to welcome one another. It doesn’t mean we will have the same depth of friendship and affection with every single person in the church. And there are some people who will be more difficult for you than others. And I apologize for being one of those. But I love a story Ray Ortlund heard from his father about Bill Bright the founder of Campus Crusade for Christ. Bill said years ago that he had learned not just to live by faith but to love by faith. He said if he walked into a room and saw a person that he had had a difficult time with, and the relationship was no longer a very good one, he would say a quick prayer to love him by faith as he made a beeline toward him and looked him in the eye. And he believed as he made his way toward that person, the Lord would give him what he needed for that to be real. That’s loving by faith.
- Ray also said his dad taught him there are two ways to walk into a room where there is a group of people. One way is “Here I am.” I am here for you to notice me and take an interest in me. The other way is, “There you are!” I am here to take an interest in you. That’s another way of saying we welcome others as Christ welcomed us. He did not wait for us to take the initiative. He came to us. There’s a third way we walk into a room. “I’m not here.” We can receive his grace to overcome that fear of being seen.

- One final passage about Gospel community. Hebrews 10:24-25. We come together to worship God. But we also come together to encourage one another. Notice the intentional verbs in that passage. We come together to “consider how to stir up one another.” So let’s not neglect to meet together, as some are in the habit of doing. But notice the opposite of “not meeting” is not just “to meet.” But it is to encourage one another. That’s Gospel community. “We love because he first loved us.” (1 John 4:19)
- Prayer
- Greet One Another