

# Understanding the Local Church

## Intro:

- *2 Timothy 4:1–5, [1] I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: [2] preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. [3] For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, [4] and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. [5] As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*
- In Paul's final words to Timothy, he gives him three groups of commands:
  - Teach the truth
  - Walk in the truth, persevere in it
  - Shepherd the flock w/ the truth and a posture of humility
  - WHY? Because of this time to come...
- Guess what? The time is now.
  - Will not endure... sometimes truth is hard to hear
  - Sound teaching... that which protects and promotes the gospel
  - Itching ears... Want to hear whatever will scratch their itch
  - Accumulate teachers... Let's summarize: "YouTube whoever agrees with their current presupposition"
  - Turn away from truth and wander into myth... myth is rooted in a kernel of truth
- There is so much confusion about the nature & importance of the local church
  - This is in large part b/c there is a God-designed tension that we need to walk in (local & universal, already & not yet)
  - It is also b/c we are surrounding ourselves with myths that justify our own views rather than truth that shapes us and challenges us
- Because THIS is the accepted standard in our current culture
  - A culture that despises truth
  - A culture that rewrites that which doesn't tickle its ears or fit its narrative
  - A culture that would rather submit to itself than to God and his truth
  - A culture built upon the rebellion of sin (Gen 3)
    - This is true of many areas of our culture, from sexuality to justice and yes, church
- But we are not of this culture, we are otherworldly
  - You can't just do whatever you want. You need to make the Word of God your authority.
- And protecting the church is of the utmost importance. Why?
  - *1 Timothy 3:14–16 [14] I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, [15] if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of*

*the truth. [16] Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.*

- In other words, **Paul writes to Timothy telling him that it is crucial the church knows how to function because the local body of believers are the ones entrusted to PROTECT the gospel and PROMOTE the gospel IN THEIR COMMUNITY**
- To abandon truth is to destroy the church and to yourself. Everything is a truth issue.
  - *1 Timothy 1:9–11 [9] understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, [10] the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, [11] in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.*
    - In other words, if your doctrine is bad your behavior will eventually follow
- If you don't want to "endure" truth and submit to it, the reality is clear
  - *1 Timothy 1:19 holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith*
- Friends, if we truly are in or nearing the last days - which I believe that we are - you cannot (we cannot) afford to shipwreck our faith. We must endure to the end.
  - Don't just do whatever you want, make the Word your authority

### **Understanding the Local Church:**

- Since we live in such tumultuous times, we must create a working definition of church as a plumbline of sort
  - It should be broad enough to not micromanage and specific enough to create a framework for health.
- What is a local church? Who is a local church?
  - **A local church is a group of local believers who are committed to love God, love one another, and make disciples together.**
    - It is a visual expression of everything the New Covenant people of God are supposed to be (People who love God and people)
    - It is what we witness as we look at the examples of gathered groups of people in the NT (Acts and the epistles)
    - It is both explicitly and implicitly described in the NT
  - BELIEVERS → As we established last week, entrance into the family of God happens upon spiritual rebirth
  - LOVE GOD → Jesus summarized all of the Law and the Prophets as "Love the Lord your God w/ all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself."
    - To love God is to obey God. To obey God is to believe the Words of God and live accordingly. To do this you must know the Word of God.

- We are in essence a people renewed and transformed by the Word and by the Spirit.
    - This is why the Hebrew people knew that the essence of following God was what they called the *Shema* = hear and obey
      - If there is no desire within a supposed church or group of Christians to submit to the truth of the Word and the commands of Christ, it is most likely that the Spirit has not brought about rebirth - a flock of goats
  - LOVE ONE ANOTHER → A love and obedience to God always results in a love for others
    - After all, how can you obey Jesus and not love one another
      - 1 John says if you claim to be born again and do not love, then the Spirit of Christ does not live within you
    - Jesus says to love your fellow believer
    - Jesus says to love your enemy.
      - Pretty sure everything in between applies
    - There are 59 “one anothers” in the NT - 59 commands of how we are called to show this love to one another
    - Since we are one new family, this isn’t just something we do - it is part of our new identity
  - MAKE DISCIPLES → Like we touched on last week, we are commanded to be fruitful and multiply, to make disciples, to spiritually reproduce
    - Do you really love your neighbors if you are okay with them going to hell?
    - Do you really love your kids if you won’t disciple them?
    - Do you really love your wife if you won’t spiritually lead her?
  - COVENANTED TOGETHER → To reflect a trinitarian God requires community.
    - You can’t one another yourself. You can’t disciple yourself. You are not the body on your own. In the NT, the smallest unit Jesus sends out is two
    - If you are connected to 5 local churches, there is a disconnect in your mind.
      - Who is responsible for you? To whom are you accountable? Will I stand before God and answer for you? Will someone else? Will nobody?
    - If you simply listen to this sermon or others on youtube and nobody even knows who you are, are you covenanted to a local church?
      - Your attendance is invisible, your service is invisible, your giving is invisible, your ministry is invisible and your impact is invisible
- A common question: Since we are the church, when is something a church vs. a Bible study? Isn’t my DG my church?
  - We aren’t just talking about Christian friends who love each other, love God, make disciples. That might not be a church. When does it become a church?
- So what is it that separates a healthy Bible study from a church? **On the most basic level, the difference is that a church self-identifies as a church, covenanting together to be a church, as led by the Lord and leadership.**

- SELF IDENTIFIES
  - As an example, marriage - “We are married in the eyes of God.” Okay, does your mom think you’re married? Does your dad? Do your friends? Does your accountant? Does your girlfriend know or is she still waiting for a ring? - It isn’t a perfect metaphor, but you get the idea.
  - Revolve self identifies as a group. That group is different from Lighthouse or Coastal or OC Baptist. Rudy, Matt, and Kevin are committed to a different group of people than I am, but we are all one as members of Jesus body in South Jersey.
- COVENANTING
  - As a marriage is a public covenant to one another, a local church is covenanted to one another
  - Through better or worse, in sickness in health, in prosperity or adversity
  - As family shouldn’t run when the going gets tough, a local church is committed to itself and one another
- LED BY THE LORD
  - This is crucial b/c we aren’t looking for a reason to run away in hardship and surround ourselves with people who will tickle our ears
  - To leave a church b/c of conflict or b/c you got called out on your sin and then just start something new isn’t necessarily godly (unless you left b/c they were heretics).
    - That goes against being a covenant community
    - That goes against the one anothers
    - That goes against all that Paul warned Timothy of
  - It is most likely not led by the Lord
- All this is to say, a church is a church when it identifies as a church, covenanting together, as led by the Lord
  - Could a DG from Revolve self-identify as a church, essentially multiplying out from Revolve? Yes, it could - and it could be beautiful! Or it could be a problem b/c this isn’t a light decision
    - Are you ready to be held accountable before God?
    - Are you ready to be held in stricter judgment as a teacher?
    - Are you ready to have or not have people’s blood on your hands (as Paul says to the Ephesian elders)?
    - Are you ready to tow the line of the gospel in your community?
    - Are you ready to be held responsible for one another before God?
  - If the answer is yes, and you still feel like the Lord is leading you to self identify as a church for the purpose of loving God, loving one another, and making disciples, then ask me my opinion
  - Why? Because God places so much value on the local church that throughout the NT these things happen through the local church.
    - *Acts 13:1–3, [1] Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene,*

*Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. [2] While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." [3] Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.*

- What ministry were they set aside for? Making disciples. Forming them into local congregations. Helping those assemblies to become healthy.
- And here I will make my final observations:
  - **Church planting is primarily evangelical, not built upon any convenience, and it is a biblical result of disciples making disciples.**
  - Don't get me wrong. Just because we place a high value on church doesn't underscore another reality: Church planting begins as a mess
  - Just because a group ID's as a church doesn't mean that it is healthy, so what are some essentials? Many would say you aren't a church if these are absent
    - SACRAMENT → Ordinances
    - WORD → Accountable to Jesus, the Word, Leadership
    - DISCIPLINE → Holding one another accountable to pursue holiness
    - A healthy church is missional
    - A healthy church is a house of prayer and worship

#### **Five Observations:**

1. it is crucial the church knows how to function because the local body of believers are the ones entrusted to PROTECT the gospel and PROMOTE the gospel IN THEIR COMMUNITY
2. A local church is a group of local believers who are committed to love God, love one another, and make disciples together.
3. On the most basic level, a group of believers become a church when they self-identify as a church, covenanting together, as the Lord and leadership has led.
4. Church planting is primarily evangelical, not built upon any convenience, and is a biblical and natural result of disciples making disciples.
5. Although churches do not start off as healthy and mature, the Lord expects them to get there over time.

#### **Discuss:**

- Of the things you heard today, what resonated with you, challenged you, clarified within you, or instructed you? What is YOUR big takeaway?
- How would the Lord want you to PRAY in light of this message?
- What would the Lord want you to DO in light of this teaching?
- Who might benefit from hearing these truths? Who can you TELL?
- Share w/ your table.