

## Core Values #7 Externally Focused Church

Matthew 5:13-16, Matthew 28:16-20  
Final Message on Core Values

Modesto CRC  
September 19, 2010

### I. INTRODUCTION/REVIEW

This is the last message in our series on the core values of the church as taught in the Bible. We noted that **all 7 core values are related and build on each other.**

--Jesus called us to unity (in and because of Jesus Christ) and grace (love of another kind). When we act those out we find ourselves ready to experience discipline in the community – beginning with ourselves. Notice that all discipline, all process of dealing with offenses begin with self-examination and self-discipline in dialogue with God. We also saw how worship and justice fit together as we listen to what God says. This is critical if we are going to be his faithful people.

We see in the church the diversity that creates unity – diversity of people and gifts, so that the whole body is joined together with all its parts. We saw that trying to create comfortable uniformity destroys unity in Christ.

--All of this together encourages spiritual maturity – speaking the truth in love and showing the fruits of the Spirit, such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

--Finally, in order for a church to be spiritually and emotionally healthy, these come together in an outward or external focus. *“It is not all about us.”* **In other words, like a healthy person who invests in others, a healthy church finds joy in serving those in physical, emotional and spiritual need, in self-giving.**

Pastor Larry Fryling from Hayward told his congregation a while back that he is convinced we all need to have a tattoo on each arm. The right arm says, *“It’s not all about us”* and the left says, *“It’s not all about now.”* Unhealthy Christian churches are self-centered, consumer oriented or internally focused and have no sense of history, wanting what they want right now – no delayed gratification. I

recently read this quote in a book by Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson called The Externally Focused Church: (p. 16)

**“Internally focused churches concentrate on getting people into the church and generating activity there. These churches may create powerful worship experiences, excel in teaching, offer thriving youth programs, and have vibrant small groups, but at the end of the day, what is measured is the number of people and activities within the church. These are good churches filled with good people. And what they do is vital but not sufficient for a healthy church. Worship, teaching, and personal devotions are absolutely necessary for building the internal capacity necessary to sustain an external focus, but if all the human and financial resources are expended inside the four walls of the church, then no matter how “spiritual” things may appear to be, something is missing.”**

There are always some people who don't want to hear this message from the Bible because they think that an external focus means ignoring the people in the church. Of course, this is a both/and, not an either/or. Churches grow from the inside out, or they stagnant. We saw one part of this when we talked about worship and justice. But, is that true? Let's go look. Let's start at the beginning.

## II. WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

### A. Going back to the Beginning

When God came to Abraham to create a covenant of grace with him, what did he say? Let's look carefully at this again.

Genesis 12:1-3 “The Lord had said to Abram, ‘Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.  
I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you;  
I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.  
I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse;  
And all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

The beginning of God's covenant with Abraham was set up so that he would be blessed by God **so he could be a blessing to all peoples on earth**. This is the foundation of our covenant, of our relationship with God. **We receive so that we can give.** We saw the same thing 2 weeks ago when we talked about spiritual gifts. As the Apostle Paul says, *“We are stewards of grace.”* How often we, like Israel, have interpreted our covenant relationship with God as some sort of status

instead of a calling to bless the earth. **The Bible is clear that THE CHURCH IS GOD'S PEOPLE, CALLED TOGETHER IN WORSHIP FOR SERVICE TO EACH OTHER AND THE WORLD.** This is reflected in our purpose/vision statement.

When we look at the history of Israel in the First or Old Testament we quickly see that God's people didn't get it. For them it was all about separation, exclusion, about them and us, about Jews and Gentiles, about being God's people and the rest of the world. They didn't understand that God cared about the people in the rest of the world. For example, the story of Jonah is usually misunderstood. It is not really about a big fish, the prophet is a picture of Israel refusing to go to give God's message and service to their neighbor and enemy in Nineveh. As members of his covenant, we are awed by what God has done to bless us throughout history and in Jesus Christ and for eternity. We are then called to be a blessing – to give good news, to offer well-being or prosperity. Of course this blows any stereotypes, racism, and hatred out the window. We are to see all others as important to God.

**How important is it to God that we are a servant church** – a church that doesn't just talk about the gospel, but cares for the poor, that serves it's community, that *gives cups of cold water in Jesus name?* How important is that? Let's review a little.

Isaiah 58:6 & 7 speaks about Israel's fasting: "Is not the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to see the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter – when you see the naked to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood.

In the verses that follow the prophet says that their light will shine in the darkness and they will be blessed by God in everything they do if they care for those in need, if they make that the center of their religious activity.

**How important is it to God that we are a serving church, externally focused, looking beyond ourselves?** **You've heard us say there are more texts in the Bible that deal with God's people giving to the poor, caring for those on the margins of society – more than any other subject.** It is a little amazing how

we can spend years talking about some hot-button issue that is addressed in 4 or 5 verses and essentially ignore 2000. Is God shouting?

### B. Jesus Command about Salt, light and leaven.

In Matthew 5 we heard Jesus say that we are the **salt of the earth**, but what good is it if it loses its saltiness? Salt is for flavoring and preserving. A little salt changes the taste of a lot of food. If it is not salty, it is useless. **Are we the salt of the earth?** We are the **light of the world**, but what good is it if we hide the light? Salt and light are like words accompanied by actions, by serving that changes everything. Jesus said, ***“In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”*** **Notice what they see!** Not that they just hear our words, but see our good deeds. Then praise goes to God.

The Christian Reformed Church began sending missionaries to Nigeria already in the 1920s. The number of missionaries increased until the early 1960s, producing a handful of converts in 40 years. In the 1960s and 70s along with the missionaries we sent doctors and nurses who set up hospitals to serve people who had no modern medicine. Later we sent advisers in agriculture, education, and water management. By the 1990s the Christian Reformed Church in Nigeria was significantly larger than the Christian Reformed Church in the US and Canada, and it continues growing by 100s of baptisms every month. That church now sends out missionaries. We put concrete content into our words. A church that sees the needs of others, serves them, and is then ready, as Peter instructs, *“to give account of the hope that is in them”* bring praise to our Father in heaven.

### C. Jesus Command to make disciples.

All too often people take Jesus’ statements out of the context of the whole Bible. In Matthew 28 we heard Jesus give what is called the great commission: ***“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything***

***I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.***"

I have heard people refer to this statement as a command to witness, to tell people the gospel, to make converts – and that is all they hear. First of all, we are not called to convert people. Can't be done! We don't have the power. **Only God can do that.** That kind of church and kingdom growth is God's job. In fact this statement doesn't say a thing about **how** we are to evangelize, it is about **making disciples, about teaching all Christians by our words and actions what Jesus commanded** – which is first of all the great command to love God and each other. We all are very aware that he was just not talking about some words, but about serving after his model of servanthood, serving with cups of cold water and washing feet and seeking justice. Paul said, "*Have this mind in your that is yours in Christ Jesus...*" -- he left glory to serve you and me all the way to death. **James** asks us to show us faith that doesn't make a difference in our behavior toward others. As far as he is concerned it does not exist.

I recall back in 2002 when Dirk Hoek and others began working with Family Promise. They had a hard time getting 12 churches to become a part of the program. The biggest churches with the best facilities would not touch any program that did not allow them to first evangelize and grow their numbers. After that they would think about their needs. Thankfully, 8 years later that is all beginning to change because ironically evangelical churches (those are churches who claim the authority in the Bible) – including us are finally beginning to read it. It has been some key leaders, organizations like the CRWRC and Salvation Army, and books like The Hole in Our Gospel that have God's people taking another look at what God has expected of them. It's all about reaching beyond our comfort zones, reaching to people who have not had our kind of safety net with church and family, reaching to people who have had hard lives experiencing poverty, escape through addiction, and violence, it is all about reaching to the same sort of people who Jesus spent his teaching and caring for.

Jesus knew that going out into that world was a scary thing, so we carry his promise with us: **All authority in heaven and earth are his. "AND SURELY I AM**

**ALWAYS WITH YOU, TO THE VERY END OF THE AGE.”** At his ascension Jesus made his disciples a promise and gave them a command:

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:8

**First of all, the power comes from the Holy Spirit.** The word Jesus chose to use that is translated here as “witness” is the same root word for the word *martyr*. This has very little to do with throwing God-talk at people, this is about relationship, this is about self-giving and serving, this is about the suffering of caring love that embraces the whole person. Our “witness” is about relationship, about meeting people, about caring, about offering ourselves to reach out.

Secondly, **when the Spirit came, what happened to that early church community? Look at Acts 4:32-35.** There was no poverty among them because they shared. Sharing everything they had, there was great power as they talked about the meaning of their faith and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. **The early church was a servant church.** We are fond of talking about their phenomenal growth, and there were many reasons for it – not the least of which was their willingness to stay in the cities and serve the sick during huge plagues that happened in the first 3 centuries, their willingness to pool their money to oppose slavery and buy slaves in order to free them, their willingness to sacrifice themselves in the service of others.

The Bible is full of references about God’s care for the poor, the dispossessed, the refugees, and the outcasts of society. He knows how quickly we can think what we have is just for us. We are quick to assume we own it because we were so smart we made it. **We are to be his stewards with everything we have.** It all comes from him. Our very breath is a gift.

In the American Baptist Church in Northern California 70% of their 200 churches were in decline or dying. Their executive pastor, Paul Borden, began working with them on putting together a vision – a vision that involved service and growth. Some churches have members volunteering in and getting supplies for under-funded schools, some are working with the homeless; some put

together employment agencies for the unemployed, on and on. I heard Paul Borden speak recently and he testifies to a miracle. Now 70% of their churches are growing, and it is not transfer growth from other churches, but people coming to know the Lord through people who have served them and people who have looked at them and seen authentic Christianity.

In our history, in our DNA, is the immigrant experience. People came from another country, having to learn the language, a new culture, a strange and insecure place, so they formed churches where they could be safe and comfortable, supported by people like themselves, people who shared their experience.. It is totally understandable. The problem is that those churches became fortresses, with attitudes that are exclusive. Having heard the great commission we sent missionaries around the world, and planted churches in other US cities, but did not ourselves become externally focused and inclusive. Now we need to grow past our roots, past being a “fortress church”, obedient to the core value of being externally focused. In spite of some of the community churches in our classis (northern California area) taking in 450 new people in the last 4 years, the net loss for the area is 8. Guess where the huge losses are. Established churches that have become fortresses.

This church has done a good job at building programs for our children and our people. We have supported a Christian School for our children. We have done well at financially supporting church plants and missions. What does health look like in the next 7 to 10 years? **To be a healthy church, to be a spiritually growing church, to be an exciting church, we need to be an externally focused church**; an open-armed, inclusive church. *It is not all about us, and it is not all about now.* We are a part of God building his kingdom in this community. We have begun. People here have been leading the way. We are the salt of the earth, the light of the world, the hands and feet of Jesus in Modesto. Again, we are challenged to think about and examine our values. Are we in line with the core values God expects from his church?