

Plan for Discussion Series

Scripture Reading:

Ephesians 5:25-27,32

*Husbands, love your wives, as **Christ loved the church** and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.*

³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

The State of the Church Address

Introduction

Discuss what we are going to attempt:

New Year's day is a good time to assess things

1. Where we've come from
2. Where are we now
3. Where might we go

You may not have noticed, but we are a small congregation.

Where We've Been — We've had set backs and wins

- Loss of members 2013-2014
- As a result, the dissolution of the eldership — 2014
- and the preacher left in 2014.
- Preacher rotation — Was difficult, wore us out then
- Steve Cain came, regular preacher — Helped us out
 - has men take over some Adult classes (Book of John, Romans)
- Steve Cain went, semi-rotational preaching
- COVID hit—out low attendance dropped about in half (Many churches lost half their membership by COVID)
 - We started our Church website, conference call worship services
 - Virtual Services (ie Conference calling) are an emergency substitute not a replacement for live services
- Kevin Cleary began regular preaching

- health issue — caused last moment frantic preaching coverage
- Kevin's health became more erratic
 - We went to rotational preaching that was planned & scheduled, no more last minute scurrying to cover preaching
 - More men are regularly preaching, plus guests like Alex Newman

Where We Are Now

- Attendance low
- Contributions low
- We are a mostly elderly congregation, some middle aged, minimal to no youth

We've had some wins throughout

- More men are regularly involved in bringing the word to us now
- Bible learning has been a plus
 - Continued with Fishers of Men
 - Romans class — better understanding of righteousness, justification, grace, & mercy
 - A Study of Peter — A study of Peter throughout the NT
 - Hebrews class — better understanding of the Christ, the Son, Jesus, High Priest and Apostle, the OT & NT, shadow & substance (type & anti-type), meat & milk & foundational scripture
 - The Angel of the Lord — Jesus
 - Jesus, the Builder of the House, Heb 3:3,4,6
- Regular preaching rotation (Four regular speakers, plus some extras)

Where We Might Go

Some ideas before we proceed to plan for growth at West Side.

1. We are NOT responsible for growth! Did you hear that? (I know, a "dummy" question, to the "Fishers of Men" students).
 - It is not the member's or the evangelist's responsibility to increase the church.
 - Whose responsibility is it then to increase the church?

1 Corinthians 3:1-9 (ESV)

But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. ² I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, ³ for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? ⁴ For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human?

⁵ *What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord*

assigned to each. ⁶ I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷ So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. ⁸ He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. ⁹ For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.

- Our job is to plant (evangelize) & water (teach)
- God's responsibility is to give the increase.
 - Noah preached for 120 years and saved 8 souls (which includes himself!) — So, what did he do wrong?
 - Jonah didn't want to preach to Nineveh and they repented — what did he do right?
 - If you read the story, Jonah wanted the Assyrians to be condemned.
- Our numbers may not increase, but that does **NOT** necessarily mean we are not doing anything or we are doing wrong.

2. We must prepare ourselves, so we **CAN** help others

- Matthew

Matthew 7:3-5 (ESV)

Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

- Hebrews 5:11-14

We've heard this before, it's what prompted our study of meat & milk of the scriptures. The Hebrew writer says:

Hebrews 5:11-14 (ESV)

*About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. ¹² For though by this time **you ought to be teachers**, [Notice he didn't say evangelists!] you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, ¹³ for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.*

If we only feed on milk, not solid food, then we are unskilled in the word of righteousness. Solid food is for the mature, **WHO THROUGH CONSTANT PRACTICE/USE** train their discernment to distinguish good from evil.

We have to **PRACTICE** what we **PREACH**

→ The 1st thing we normally think about when thinking about church growth is **evangelism**. But the Hebrew writer here says, they ought to be teachers. If we go with the Eph 5:23ff metaphor of the husband is Christ and the wife is the Church then their children are Christians. And one purpose of the husband & wife is to produce offspring. **BUT** notice how

little time is spent in a family producing offspring. Much, much more time is spent on nurturing the produced offspring. **How much time do we spend on a Christian once they are born again?** All of our time (AND sermons) seems to be about producing offspring and it's every member's responsibility to produce them! What about once their born? What then? What is the church of Christ mantra? _Hear, Repent, Believe, Confess, and be baptized (born again). That's making babies!!! Where's the nurturing? Where's the instruction in righteousness? Some throw in after being baptized... walk in faith (or stay faithful). Most of our time and teaching should be, I believe, in teaching the nurturing and admonition of the Lord.

→ We need to be able to teach those Christians less learned in the scriptures than we. Priscilla & Aquila taught Apollos more accurately in the scriptures.

Acts 18:25,26 (ESV)

[Apollos] had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. ²⁶ *He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.*

- Let God purify you

Isaiah 6:1-8 (ESV)

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory!”

⁴ *And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.* ⁵ *And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”*

⁶ *Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar.* ⁷ *And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”*

⁸ *And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.”*

→ We need to be purified. I was going to say, "purify ourselves," but we're not the one who purifies us. God is the one. So we need to be purified.

→ We need to **submit** to God and change, i.e. to conform to His teaching. To rely on His wisdom.

→ **If God** is going to add to our number, why would he do that if we can't service those He brings our way?

3. Do we use our own understanding? What seems right in our own eyes?

- Or do we base our actions on what we can see in the scriptures?
- We can use Jesus building a house metaphor.
- We need to make sure we establish the foundation found in scripture upon the Rock
 - We need to learn how to handle differences in opinion

Conclusion — Final thoughts

We've been through some tough times, some things beyond our abilities

- Past congregational disagreements diminished our numbers and contributions, left us without a "pulpit" preacher.
- COVID cut our diminished number in half. Many churches lost about 1/2 their membership due to COVID.
- We've had opportunity over the last eight years to nurture the men into a rotational speaking arrangement.
- We've had opportunity to study & discover the Bible as a congregation without "professional" guidance.

Recognize We are not responsible for growth, God is

- We water & plant (evangelize and teach), But God gives the increase.

We must prepare ourselves, so we CAN help others

- Remove the beam from your own eye so you can remove specks from others.
- We need to be able to teach our fellow Christians more accurately.
- We need to submit to God and let Him purify us.

Do not rely on our own understanding

- It is not within man to guide his own steps.
- Our direction MUST come for the Lord.

Invitation

We are extending the invitation, now, to anyone who is subject to it. Come, while we stand and sing.