

Bethel Church House Values

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Blueprints: God's Design for a Vibrant Church. This has been our fall series for the purpose of uniting our two campuses into one shared vision for the kind of church we believe God has called us to be. A biblical church. A vibrant church. A Christ-exalting Church.

We have used the metaphor of a house and the rooms of a house to describe biblical priorities. We started in the basement and saw that the foundation of the church is Jesus. *It is all about Him.* We went into the living room where all of life is lived as an act of worship. Then we moved to the family room where Christians fellowship and love one another. The kitchen is where we are nourished by the Word of God as it is taught and applied. Then we looked at the family garden where the members of the house/church serve and labor for the common good with gifts given by the Holy Spirit for that purpose. We spent time in the prayer closet of the house. Last week we saw the church called to gospel neighboring.

Our final message asks, what are the cultural values of our church? All homes have them whether they are written down or not. These values shape the culture and climate of the home and largely determine what kind of family experience is found there.

My brother-in-law Jeff is a pastor in the Kansas City area. To make sure that his family keeps the right values for their family, he painted a display in their stairwell:



Every time they go upstairs, the values are put before them. Every time they go down the stairs, they are reminded of those values. Do they always live up to them? No. But they do hold out before them the kind of home they want to have and what they aspire to be.

Churches have family values. Written or not, these values shape the culture and climate of the church; the kind of family they are. Do they always live up to them? No. But they remind us of the kind of church we aspire to be.

Bethel Church House Values

Truth over tradition

And he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' But you say, 'If a man tells his father or his mother, "Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban" ' (that is, given to God)—then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do." (Mark 7:9-13)

The Pharisees are infamous for loving tradition and ignoring Scripture. The example Jesus gives is of a Pharisee sleight of hand. The fifth commandment was to honor your father and mother. The Pharisees had a tradition that said if you say over the money that you would have used to take care of aged parents, "This is committed to God," then you don't have to care for them. That wasn't in the Bible anywhere, but it was a tradition. The tradition contradicted the truth, but for the Pharisees, tradition trumped truth.

Does this happen in churches? All the time. The seven famous words that kill a church are, "This is how we've always done it." This is another way of saying the past trumps the future. Old wineskins are preferred over new ones.

As a general rule, if you are on the side of the Pharisees you are on the wrong side of the issue. What trumps what? What is more authoritative than what? Truth? Tradition? Tradition has power. It feels right because it feels safe and sentimental.

However, this is not an emotional issue; it's really a theological one. Is God's Word our authority or not? NOT, how have we done it or how have we thought about it, but what does God's word say? It really is a battle for the supremacy and sufficiency of God's Word.

Authority in the church comes from God's Word in Scripture. Truth trumps tradition. This is why Jesus drove the Pharisees crazy. He was constantly confronting their traditions with truth; whether that was healing a man on the Sabbath or ceremonial hand washing before dinner or whatever, Jesus lived according to the truth NOT the traditions of man.

One of my favorite compliments I have ever received was actually intended to be a smear against me. Someone overheard this and told me about it. Years ago we were making some significant changes in the church and guess what, someone was complaining about it. The other person said, "Have you talked to Steve about it?" The fellow said, "What good would that do? He'd just say, where's that in the Bible?"

Let's be a "where's that in the Bible?" kind of church. Now I know the Bible doesn't address everything directly and much of ministry is faithful application of biblical principles. Still, it is

important that we hold as a value that the Bible is in ink and everything else is in pencil. This allows us to avoid the mistake of so many churches that become irrelevant.

We stepped out of our comfort zone this year with *Mission Them* and adding a second location. The auditoriums of both campuses look different than they did a year ago. *Mission Them* is going to continue to pull us out of our comfort zones. Our cultural value of truth and gospel over tradition should keep us not only okay with it, but excited about it. Tradition doesn't save anyone; truth does, because Jesus is truth. Truth over tradition.

Elder-led membership/Deacon-led service

- *And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (Acts 14:23)*
- *This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you. (Titus 1:5)*

Bethel is an elder-led church. We are this because the New Testament repeatedly makes it clear that elders are to lead the church. Peter calls them under-shepherds. 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 lay out the qualifications for an elder. Titus calls for a plurality of elders. We follow that model.

The primary role of the elders is to protect the doctrine, direction, and discipline of the church. Doctrine is the teaching of the church. Direction is the vision of the church. And discipline safeguards the purity of the church.

We also have deacons. Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 3 describe "deacon" as an office in the church. Deacons lead in the serving ministries of the church. Elders are servant leaders providing oversight to the flock. Deacons minister and lead in the serving opportunities. We are blessed to have wonderful leadership in both offices and I encourage you to pray for them.

Notice that I say an elder-led membership. We also have the cultural value of membership. Shepherds are called to lead the sheep. To do so they need to know who their sheep are. When sheep say, "This is my flock," the elders can also say, "These are my sheep."

This *Blueprints* series is the easiest path to membership we will have. In lieu of our normal five weeks of classes, if you listen live or online to the whole series, we have only one meeting to attend (see www.bethelweb.org for details).

There is nothing of greater blessing to a church than godly and skilled shepherds and leaders. The church largely rises and falls on the quality of its leadership and we want a culture of humble shepherds who lead and godly sheep who follow.

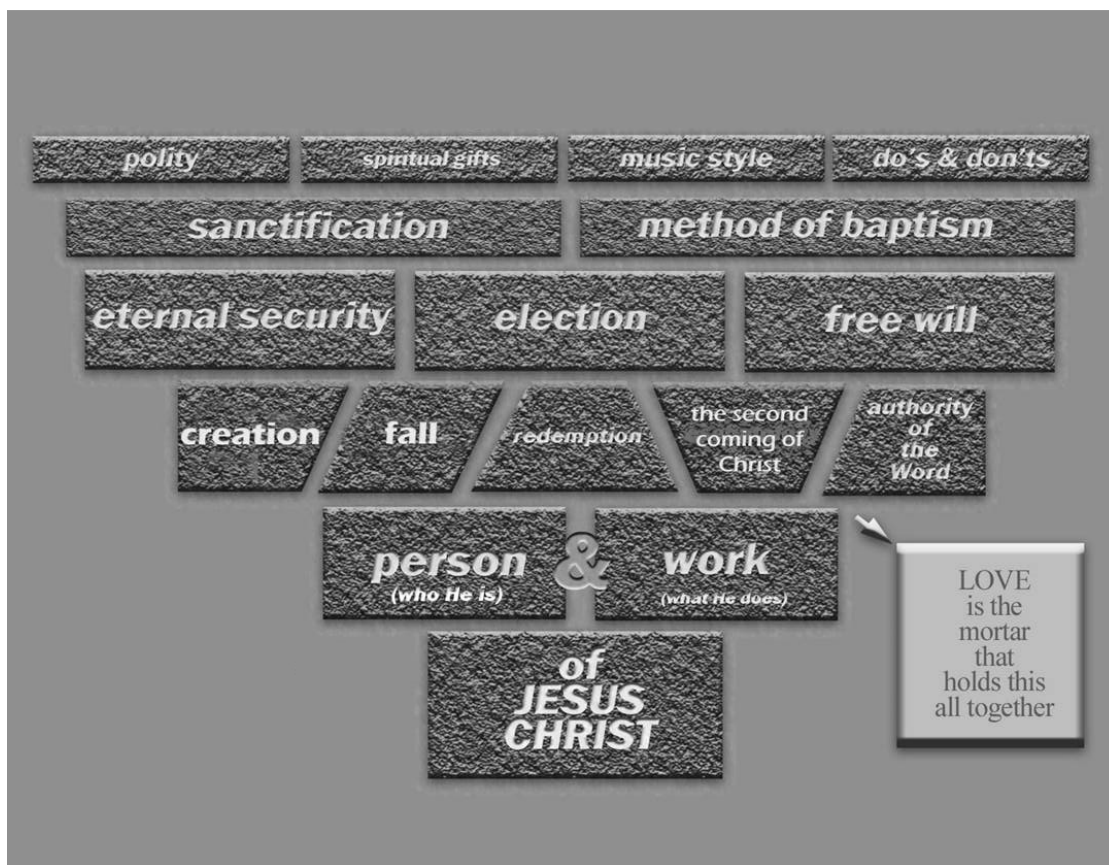
Weighted theology—Keeping the main thing the main thing

One of the great failures of the Pharisees was that they had a weight problem. When it came to beliefs and values, they got things backwards. They made a big deal about small and less significant matters. The big and important issues, they treated lightly. Jesus called this *straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!* He also said, *You tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness.*" (Matthew 23:23-24) They obsessed over mint and dill and missed justice and mercy. They had a weight problem.

How do you avoid that? You keep the main thing the main thing because by doing that a minor thing doesn't rise higher in importance than it should. If you've been around churches you know how easily this happens. Some lesser important matter becomes a flashpoint and quickly Christians will fight and tear down each other over the lesser issue completely ignoring the things God really cares about like love, and unity, and the testimony of the church in the community.

We believe in weighted theology; not everything is as heavy or important as everything else. Again, God's Word is the guide to what is important. If the Bible makes it important, then it's important. If you are obsessed with whether Adam had a belly button, you're not going to get much of a hearing around here.

Below is the Inverted Pyramid. The "big stuff" is on the bottom and the lesser things are on the top. We need to keep the main things (the stuff on the bottom) the main things.



Unity in Diversity

- *I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.* (John 17:23)
- *I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.* (Ephesians 4:1-3)

When a church keeps the main thing the main thing (Christ, the gospel, and the foundational truths of the faith) it can maintain unity even when there are varying opinions on secondary issues. This is why *It's all about Him* is so important because it implicitly means it's not about me and people don't have to be exactly me for me to accept them. Acceptance doesn't require agreement on everything as long as we agree on the essentials. The old saying says it well, "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty, in all things charity."

I must also say that this diversity in unity includes other diversities; an important one in Northwest Indiana is racial diversity. We embrace this truth—red and yellow, black and white, they are all precious in his sight and if they are precious in his sight, they must be in ours. Unity in the midst of diversity coalesced around the person and work of Christ.

Holiness NOT legalism

- *If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations—"Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. (Colossians 2:20-23)*
- *Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God. (2 Corinthians 7:1)*

I have shared my story many times about growing up in a sincere but legalistic brand of Christianity. Most of the young people who grew up in it left very confused about what it means to be a Christian. If you were to ask them, what is a Christian? They would say, follow the rules—rules that largely were not found anywhere in Scripture.

I have found that many people here share my background and can relate to the confusion. It's a flawed model of sanctification. The label often put on it is legalism. It's a good word, but I think people throw it around a lot without understanding it. Here's a good definition: "Legalism is that attempt to establish or maintain a right standing with God by means of our own efforts." (Zaspel)

I don't have time to get into to it too much other than to say that legalists add to God's moral stipulations, either to be saved (as in the early church's arguments over circumcision and other Levitical requirements) or how to live and grow as a Christian (as in the modern church's misunderstanding of sanctification).

This creates all kinds of problems and massive hypocrisy in the church as everyone tries to keep up appearances and nobody can be real or authentic or imperfect, OR Christians discover that there is no biblical warrant for the rule and they swing over to the other side and think, *I am spiritual because I am free to do this* (which is just a subtler form of legalism).

Our cultural value is holiness of life NOT spiritual measurement either by not doing something or the freedom to do it. We reject both. *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son. (Romans 8:29)*

A friend of mine recently described the Christian life as the process of becoming Jesus Jrs. That stuck with me. Sanctification is the process of conforming more and more to the likeness of Christ. Here's how our church doctrinal statement says it:

"After receiving salvation, believers exhibit a positive moral change and begin a life of progressive sanctification whereby they increasingly obey God's Word. Genuine Christians display evidence of God's sanctifying work as they exhibit a growing aversion to sin, strength of faith, commitment to holiness, demonstration of righteousness, and love for Christ. While it is impossible for the sinful nature to be completely eradicated in this earthly life, the Holy Spirit helps believers experience lasting victory over sin as they strive to increasingly reflect the attitudes and actions of Christ." (Bethel Church Doctrinal Statement)

"Increasingly reflect the attitudes and actions of Christ." Jesus Jrs. Holiness NOT legalism.

A redemptive community

What do we mean by a redemptive community? The gospel is for sinners. *All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;* (2 Corinthians 5:18). A redemptive community is one that firmly believes that sin can be forgiven and sinners can be restored.

Pastor Gary said something to me recently in passing that really struck me. He handles much of our counseling. He said, "I cheer for sinners every day." We're cheering for sinners—not cheering for their sin—but cheering for their redemption and their recovery.

I have said it this way before, in dealing with people that if we have to err on any side, let us err on the side of love. There are so many hard situations. Marriages blowing up. People acting in the flesh. Love doesn't mean overlooking things, but it does mean that we love people and realize that people need the Lord which creates cheering for sinners and celebration when God redeems them and restores them. We're a redemptive community.

Generosity

- *Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Corinthians 9:7)*
- *You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. (2 Corinthians 9:11)*

Some of you think you know where I am going. *He's talking about money.* Well, Paul was talking about money and generosity so, yes, it must include that.

What I really want to paint on the wall here is a spirit of generosity. Self-giving based on God's self-giving of Christ to save us. His generosity to us is the motivation of our generosity to him and to his kingdom. Spiritual generosity. It's having hearts generous in so many ways—caring for others, open to others with friendship, generous in time and service, ready to sacrifice who we are and what we have for whatever the Lord's work requires.

Give it away. Die to self. Be generous for the Lord's sake. Generosity.

Review

- **Truth over tradition**—a church living for today and tomorrow, not yesterday.
- **Elder-led membership**—sheep who know their flock led by shepherds who know their sheep
- **Weighted theology** – keep the main thing the main thing
- **Unity in diversity**
- **Holiness NOT legalism**
- **A redemptive community**—cheering for sinners to be restored
- **A generous church** with generous Christians resourcing gospel ministry here and around the world.

Those are the blueprints as we see them, built on Christ as the foundation. May God build Bethel into an increasingly vibrant church and I hope each of you want to be a part of it.

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