

ROCKY MOUNT CHURCH NEWSLETTER

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Foundations of Truth

Offer or Declaration? The gospel is the greatest message ever delivered by the lips of man. It is a message of grace, love, mercy, and deliverance. Many have the idea that the gospel is an offer, but is that truly the case? There is hope offered in the gospel, but to whom it is such hope offered? To the believer or to the unbeliever? Only a believer can embrace the hope found in Christ and only the person who has been born again can believe. The gospel is better described as a declaration. It would be foolish to offer life to the dead. Jesus never did that. He often asked someone if they've wanted to be healed but when he raised the dead, he simply gave the command. So it is with the new birth. The dead cannot hear, receive, accept, or obey. Those dead in sin must be made alive in Christ. Then we can seek to be saved: saved from error, from ungodliness, from false religion, from self-righteousness, and from the pitfalls of Satan. Thank you God for giving, not simply offering, salvation and for making us alive in Christ!

Matt Jordan, pastor

Announcements

We were saddened by the recent loss of Sister Evelyn Rains, a member of Rocky Mount Church since 1939. An obituary will be included in next month's newsletter.

We have lunch the 1st Sunday of each month, followed by a time of fellowship and devotion focused on and led by the young people of the church.

The Priority of a Clear Conscience

"And herein do I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward men"
Acts 24:16

The conscience is God's watchman in the soul. Its function is to monitor and register behavior. Like Mr. Recorder in Bunyan's Holy War, whose voice shook the whole town of Mansoul with words like thunder-claps, the conscience passes judgment from within the heart of man according to what it believes to be right and true. In a vivid reference to the conscience, Solomon said, *"The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly"* (Pro. 20:27).

Conscience is a God-given, internal control by which a man is distinguished from an animal as a creature made in God's image. The root of the word, science, speaks of "knowledge". The prefix con means "with." Conscience, then, is knowledge with oneself, or knowledge from within. Man is created, in other words, with an innate knowledge, a capacity from within to scrutinize and pass judgment on himself. The Puritan John Trapp expressed the function of conscience when he said, "Conscience is God's spy and man's overseer."

As the resident "judge" within the heart, conscience either "accuses or excuses" (Rom. 2:14). When it "excuses" or vindicates, the individual experiences joy: *"For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity...we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward"* (2 Cor. 1:12). When it "accuses" or convicts (Jno. 8:9), the individual experiences bitter agony of heart: *"And Peter remembered the words of Jesus... 'Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.' And he went out, and wept bitterly"* (Mt. 26:75).

Because the pain of a guilty conscience is so intense, Paul made it his ambition to conduct himself in such a way that his conscience would be clear. A clear conscience, “toward God and toward man,” is inexpressibly sweet. It makes the step nimble and the burden light. An offended conscience, however, is unspeakably bitter. It makes one’s going “staid and slow” and complicates the ordinary cares of life by a preoccupation with guilt and regret. Everyone who has ever lived with a defiled conscience knows the reality of Solomon’s words: *“Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop.”*

No wonder Paul “exercised” (lit. trained, disciplined) himself to maintain a pure conscience. A conscience in which there is no cause for offense liberates for energetic labor and unimpaired usefulness in Christ’s service: *“Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight”* (I Jno. 3:21-22). Nothing is more essential than that the believer live in such a way that he will have no cause for regret. **Michael L. Gowens, Sovereign Grace Publications**

“Where There Is No Vision, The People Perish...” Pr.29:18

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Solomon penned down for us the wisdom of God and it calls for our serious consideration. In the first part of this verse, we find no restrictions or qualifications that would limit this wise counsel to one group or another. He simply says that a “people” need a vision; otherwise they face a dreadful end. Such wisdom would certainly benefit organizations in the business world, or athletic teams in the world of sports, and perhaps even political parties. This wisdom would apply to any group of people united by a common purpose or in a shared mission. Reading the entire verse, though, we see that God is specifically speaking of and to His people. God says if His people do not have a vision, the end is certain. If the Lord’s people are to avoid this end, the counsel is unmistakably plain – there must be a vision; there must be an understanding of the vision; and there must also be a willingness to uphold that vision.

So, what is meant by the word “vision”? What was the vision the Lord’s people were to have? Does this wisdom from the Old Testament apply to us or to the Church in the New Testament Age? As people of God called out from the world for a specific purpose, should the Church have a vision? And if so, what is that vision? Is there an application for us today individually, or as families, or in our relationships, or in any of our endeavors in life? Let’s consider these questions from the standpoint of the church.

A vision can be something that is ‘seen’, perhaps in a dream or in a trance, but from that vision, there is always a message to be conveyed. (Consider Isaiah 1:1-2) According to Strong’s, the word ‘vision’ is defined as a message, a prophecy, or a divine communication. Does the Lord have a message for the Church today? Has He divinely communicated a message to the New Testament Church? Without a doubt, He has! And what is that message? Read these two passages from God’s word: Colossians 1:18 and Ephesians 4:11-16. We are told that the body of Christ is to magnify her Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Church has been given gifts and they have been given for a purpose. We also learn that the Church has been equipped with all she needs to fulfill her purpose, and she is to look to her Head alone to supply those needs. Through the divine communication of New Testament Scripture, the Church has been given her vision; she has received her message – lift up Christ so that he has the preeminence in all that you do and in all that you are. It is in the New Testament that we learn what the church should believe and how the church should worship. It is where we find the pattern, the examples, and the instructions that we are to follow. If we embrace the New Testament as our rule of faith and practice, we have embraced the vision for the Church! There has been no new revelation since the close of the New Testament canon of Scripture. The instructions are to be found in God’s word and in God’s word alone. The vision given to us by God tells us WHAT the Church should be. And simply stated, the local assembly SHOULD be what the Church IS – the body of Christ: a visible, active, and living organism with a purpose for its existence.

The vision for the New Testament Church begins with an understanding of her purpose. In 1Timothy 3:15, the house of God is described as the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. The Church is the repository and upholder of truth. Scripture reveals the truth of God concerning His purpose in salvation and our purpose here in the world. An understanding of these truths should have an effect in the lives of the Lord’s

people; collectively as the local assembly and individually as members of the assembly. We are individual members unified and connected in one body, striving for one purpose. The desired effect of the gospel is to bring about a change in our manner of life. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God. It is profitable, beneficial to us, for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness. If a message is grounded in God's word, then our manner of thinking and our lives ought to be reshaped by that message. We can then begin to be an influence in the lives of those around us as they see the change that has taken place in our own life. If we are disciples of Jesus Christ, we will be as salt and light in the world; as a Church in the community and in our own little world individually. If we do not understand our purpose or if we fail to focus on our purpose, we will become like the people in the Church at Laodicea – neither cold nor hot, who were no longer concerned about repentance or changed lives, and had lost their influence on those around them. Being salt and light in the world begins with individual sacrifice. And only when we receive God's word AS God's word, and not the word of men, will we see the need to apply it to our lives. If it is a message from God, it demands acceptance and it calls for obedience. The results are glory to God and joy to our souls. As individual members and as a body, we must uphold the truth by word and deed; not only by saying it, but by living it!

In addition, we need to understand that the vision for the church should have a wide scope – it should be inclusive, shared by all – no partiality, no schisms, but unity and harmony among the members (see James 2). If we understand that our vision is inclusive, we will not be respecters of persons; we will not show partiality toward one member or a small group of members. The Church should act as one body united in their concern for one another. If we are acting in this manner, we will not overlook the spiritual and physical needs of any one member. We will not neglect to bear one another's burdens. The joys and sorrows alike will be shared by all. We will also share our expectations of one another, concerned with what the Lord expects from us individually as well as from the body as a whole. Our exhortation and our encouragement will be offered to each one equally. We will regard the gifts and the examples of every member. We will cultivate a warm, loving environment where those gifts can be exercised and others can benefit from the examples. We will be concerned with the spiritual growth of every member, leaving no one to fall by the wayside. The responsibility of the Church to administer discipline will be carried out consistently with humility and with an unbiased love, always desiring to honor God's word with the hope of restoration. In all things, the church should seek to be inclusive and to seek unity among the members of the body.

Further, to understand the vision for the church, we must ask, 'what is our motive?' We should be willing to examine ourselves to be sure our motive is genuine (see 2Corinthians 13:5). Ultimately, everything we do and say in serving the Lord and one another should be motivated by love. Jesus said we should keep his commandments if we love him. We demonstrate our love for him by obeying Christ, showing our desire to magnify him in word and deed. The evidence that we are disciples of Christ is seen in our love one to another. This goes beyond just saying the words but is manifest by putting our love into action. This type of love does not seek her own but is willing to sacrifice for the sake of others and is described in Scripture as charity. Our motive in defending the truth should not be to prove we are the true Church, which is really a self-serving motive. The need to maintain 'the old paths' is important but even this should not be allowed to overshadow the true motive. Our steadfastness in truth must be grounded in our love for Christ. In all that we do, our motive should be Christ-centered, not self-centered. Without the proper motive, we become like the Church at Ephesus, which was in danger of having the candlestick removed. They were sound in doctrine, dedicated in their labor, but they forgot the most important thing. This love, or charity, is the tie that binds us. It is a uniting principle that encourages us to labor together and to grow in faith and in knowledge. The practice of such love strengthens our entire moral character. Any motive that falls short of the love of Christ does not honor God and the work we do will not last.

Finally, if we are convinced that the Church should have a vision, we should step out in faith to fulfill that vision. Remember, a vision is a divinely communicated message from God to His people. Are we taking the message to heart? Have we committed ourselves fully to heeding the message? Or, are we only giving lip service to the message? Do we look for the Lord to fulfill His promise? Are we expecting great things of the Lord, or are we satisfied with the status quo? Commitment to God's word makes a change in a person's life.

Likewise, a dedicated and committed Church, one that is growing in grace, in faith, and in knowledge, should look for changes to take place in the body. There may be some things we are not doing that we should be doing. There may be some things that need to be left off. In the Book of Acts, we see the Church in its purest form, before man-made customs and traditions had taken root. We can enjoy freedom and liberty to their fullest when there are no hindrances or stumbling blocks. Liberty and freedom make an excellent environment where faith can grow and the promises of God shower down. Shouldn't our faith incline us to claim the same promise that was so clearly manifest in the early days of the Church? In those early days, the people were described as continuing steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in breaking of bread, and in prayer. They were meeting often and ministering to one another selflessly (Acts 2:42-47). Evidently, they were not satisfied with seeing each other every once in a while, but desired to assemble frequently. As the disciples went out sharing the glorious truth of God's grace, the hand of the Lord was with them, and people turned to the Lord in faith (Acts 11:21). Such commitment to the Lord and to one another strengthens the body. Every time we sacrifice something of ourselves, whether our time or our resources, in order to minister, to serve, and to worship, we mature in Christ. The Church is a visible, active, and living body. The Lord is pleased and honored by the sincere efforts of His people to grow spiritually through humble service. And He sees fit to add to that body such as should be saved. Again, are we expecting great things of the Lord? Or, have we become lukewarm in our service to God? Have we become complacent in denying the reality of our state of affairs? Is our faith strong enough to lay hold of the promises that God has made to His people? May the Lord help us to see, to understand, to focus on, and to faithfully pursue the vision, in our own lives and within the body of Christ.

Elder Matt Jordan

An Attitude of Gratefulness

Job 1:20 "Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, 21 And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. 22 In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly."

In times of great sorrow, it is often difficult to maintain the proper perspective on life. It is not uncommon for us to dwell on the negative rather than the positive things that are before us and in our past. In these verses (Job 1:20-22), Job has just been informed that all his children were killed at one time in a single wind storm. This is a great tragedy with which any loving parent would have great difficulty coping. However, Job's reaction is the proper one.

We see that scripture says that "Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." In other words, Job's reaction was quite proper within the context of being a believer. As believers, we can approach life and death with a different mindset. Job, rather than being sorrowful for what he had lost, rejoices in what he had been given. Yes, he had just lost all of his children, but he realizes that he was blessed to have ever had the experience of having them in the first place. So, rather than sulk in his sorrows, he cries out "blessed be the name of the Lord."

We have so much to be thankful for in our lives every day. With that in mind, we should adopt an attitude that shows thankfulness in all things. Some call this an "attitude of gratitude." Maybe that is just a bit too glib, but there is some truth in that little phrase. If we can remember to be thankful for those things with which we have been blessed, we will have less time to sorrow over the things that have passed us by or have come and gone. So, when sorrow comes, focus on the things you do or have had rather than focusing on the losses. It will make life a lot more bearable and will certainly draw you closer to Christ

Elder Marty Hoskins, Salvation By Grace Alone Website

Thought for the Day

Father please help us by thy dear Grace, to not just love those who love us but reach out as Jesus did,
and love and help those who have not been with us all along the way.
Help us Dear Father to esteem others better than ourselves.