

I Have A Dream Wk2

REVIEW: Last week we began a new series that has as one of its goals: changing the culture of our church. To start that process off we began to look at church membership, and that while there is no express command in Scripture to be a member of a church (which BTW there are a number of things we hold dear in which there is no express command in Scripture (praying before meals, abortion, etc.)), the example set for us throughout NT history is that you do not see believers standing on their own. They were committed to the cause of Christ in their community by being counted among the believers in that community.

INTRO: So to continue on this morning with church membership, I begin by posing a question: “What is the difference between two Christians that belong to the same church, and two Christians that belong to different churches.”

I. The dilemma

A. Here are some of the commonalities between two Christians that belong to the same church and two that belong to different churches

1. They all belong to the Church (universal)
2. All are obligated to love one another
3. To pray for one another, to encourage one another
4. To even rebuke sin in one another
5. Even to care for each other financially when the need arises

B. So what is the difference?

1. If we say there is no difference, then the local church does not exist
 - a) Similar to saying that there is no difference between a husband, his wife and all other relationships he has with women
 - b) That would be true if it were not for the marriage covenant
 - c) The marriage does exist and so there is a BIG difference in how a husband treats his wife and all other females in his life
2. The local church does exist and so there should be some difference in the relationships
3. Here is the difference: two Christians in the same church are capable of exercising formal discipline over each other if the need arises, but not a Christian from another local church

II. There are two ways to think of the church that we will consider - the church as an institution, and the church as its people

A. To see the church as an institution we have to do a little walk through Scriptural history

1. The nation of Israel was a special nation, given a special job - to represent God on earth

I Have A Dream Wk2

- a) If the other nations wanted to know what God was like, they were to look at Israel
- b) God had given them an elaborate set of laws so they would know how to represent Him
2. Israel failed at their task in epic proportions
 - a) They cared more about the acceptance of their peers around them
 - b) They wanted to imitate the other nations, rather than leading the pack and setting the standard that God asked
 - (1) Remind you of anything?
3. Eventually a man by the name of Jesus came along and shook up the establish setting of who represents God on earth
 - a) He informed the people of Israel that their place of privilege was being removed
 - b) He would be the one representing the Father - in fact He was God and the perfect image of the Father
 - c) He was establishing a kingdom with a particular set of people - people that were repentant, poor in spirit, and humble like children
 - d) The citizens of this kingdom, that are purchased through His death on the cross, would join Him in representing God on earth
4. Now we see a potential problem: in a kingdom that does not have define borders like we usually think, anyone could claim to be a citizen!
 - a) The previous reps for God were marked off
 - (1) They had a land
 - (2) They had things to set them apart when they left the land - circumcision, the Sabbath, and dietary laws
 - b) How would this new group representing the kingdom be marked off - and who becomes the border patrol?
 - c) Here is what we are getting at with this
 - (1) Who will speak for God on earth?
 - (2) Think about it, has anyone here every stood behind this podium (Picture of White House podium) and spoke on behalf of the President?
 - (a) Would you want to?
 - (b) Would you want to represent the United States and the mind of the President to the world?
 - (c) Its a tall order
 - (3) Now, if Jesus has imperium, if He is over the state, if he has supreme authority, who speaks on His behalf?
 - (a) Can an individual simply claim to belong to Jesus' kingdom and represent Him to earth

I Have A Dream Wk2

- (b) If you wouldn't do that for the President, why would you do that for Jesus?
- d) So this leaves us with a question: Who does watch over the borders of this new kingdom of Jesus
- 5. The answer is found in Matthew 16 (please turn there)
 - a) The opening verses are about Jesus warning the disciples against the Pharisees and Sadducees
 - (1) Being placed right before the verses we consider, it is as if Jesus is saying, "Yes, they think they are in charge, but they are getting the boot"
 - (2) Their time is ending, and I will be setting up a new paradigm
 - b) In response to Jesus question, "Who do you say that I am?", Peter replies, "You are the Messiah, Son of the Living God"
 - (1) Jesus confirmed this answer by telling Peter that this answer came from the Father in heaven
 - (2) Then comes verses 18-19, the two most controversial verses about the church
 - (a) It is beyond the scope of the message to dig into other views on this passage, but suffice it to say that some of the more popular views do not have the Scriptural support to continue to be held
 - (b) The meaning of the passage falls on the words of "Peter" and "on this rock"
 - i) Peter and rock are the same word (masculine and feminine forms)
 - ii) Jesus is making a play on words here
 - (c) The argument usually comes down to the idea that either Jesus is building His church on Peter (either alone or as representative of the apostles), or that Jesus is building His church on Peter's confession
 - (d) Here is some straight talk for you
 - i) Peter is not nor can he be the foundation of the church
 - (1) That job is Christ's
 - (2) He is the foundation
 - ii) The confession alone means nothing without confessors (people that believe)
 - iii) So Jesus will not build His church on words, and not on people, but on people that believe the Word (the gospel)
 - c) Next Jesus goes on to give Peter and the apostles the keys of the kingdom

I Have A Dream Wk2

- (1) This act represents giving the confessors the ability to act as Christ just did with Peter
 - (a) “Man did not reveal this to you, but My Father in heaven”
 - (b) Jesus recognizes a true confessor
 - (c) The church, has begun in the apostles, has the keys to the kingdom to recognize true confessors
 - i) Does the church do it perfectly - of course not
 - ii) Why do you think we have so many warnings in Scripture about discerning carefully, and the false ones that come in Jesus name
- (2) The passage also talks about binding and loosing and understanding what the rabbi’s thought on this is helpful
 - (a) Rabbi’s might decide what part of a law applied to a person in a given situation - binding them to it
 - (b) Jesus was giving the authority to consider a confessor, their life and testimony and determine if their confession was genuine
 - i) To be the guard at the gate of the embassy and check the paperwork
- (3) Is Jesus creating a church membership class or program? No
 - (a) But He is passing on the keys of authority to the church
- d) In fact, Jesus used the term church twice in the book of Matthew
 - (1) This first time in Matt 16 - it refers to the church universal
 - (2) The next time is Matthew 18 in reference to church discipline
 - (a) Which, unless every church in the world is to weigh in on discipline issues probably is referring to a local church
 - (b) And in that passage as well the idea of binding and loosing is mentioned - an offshoot of the authority of the keys
6. All of this long argument is to say that the church has the authority in a Christian’s individual’s life as seen in the ability to recognize or remove membership
 - a) Is this authority absolute?
 - (1) Certainly not!
 - (2) But God does expect Christians to submit to oversight of their local church because they are citizens of the kingdom
 - b) Will the church exercise its authority perfectly? Certainly not. We are still fallen sinners ourselves
7. Allow me to dispel one idea that might creep in your mind with all this talk of authority and recognizing people who are part of the kingdom, and kicking out impostors

I Have A Dream Wk2

- a) The argument is simply to display for us that the local church is a God given authority in our lives that we should be living in submission to, just like the state
 - b) This is in no way intended to create a case for Keith or the leaders of this church to go on a power trip
 - c) What it should do is help us understand the incredible importance of the role the local church plays in our lives for discipline
 - (1) Do not let that word scare you
 - (2) Let me give you an example of submitting for discipline to the church
 - (a) A few months ago I went to my guys in my discipleship group and submitted myself before them by revealing a weakness that I have struggled with
 - (b) I did that as a form of discipline
 - i) Not in the punitive sense like, "Well now you are in trouble!"
 - ii) But in the sense of building a safety net for me so I knew I would have to answer to them about this issue
 - iii) It was about sharing the load, and using my brothers in Christ as a means of support - which is what we are supposed to be about
 - iv) It's part of discipleship which shares its root word with discipline
8. So what is a local church
- a) Its a group of Christians, gathering regularly in congregation-wide exercise of affirmation and oversight with the purpose of representing Christ on earth, using preaching and the ordinances
 - b) Notice those last few items separate the local church from five brothers at a Tigers game
9. So what then is church membership?
- a) It is when a church affirms a person's confession of faith and baptism as credible, and the church promises to oversee that person's discipleship, with the individual submitting to the church's authority
 - b) It is very much like a marriage covenant - which I think we have seen that in Scripture somewhere - marriage and the church being compared
 - c) The option for a Christian in joining a church is much less about whether to join, and much more about which church to join
- B. So that was the institutional way of looking at the church, now we come to the more enjoyable way of looking at it - the flesh on the bones, so to speak
1. Shout out some metaphors that the Bible uses for the church

I Have A Dream Wk2

- a) Possible answers: the body, the bride, a temple, a family, a royal priesthood
- 2. We talked about the church and God's kingdom, partly because God's kingdom is not really a metaphor - there is a real kingdom
 - a) These others are metaphors helping us to wrap our minds around what the church is like
 - b) And there are some helpful things to remember about the metaphors
 - (1) Each one is there for a reason
 - (a) Family describes relational intimacy; the body describes mutual dependence on one another
 - (b) The temple emphasizes how God dwells with His people in a special identity; the vine and branches shows our dependence on God
 - (c) Unhealthy churches are ones that have leadership that overemphasizes one metaphor to the detriment of others - all about family intimacy, and forget different gifts, or take a hierarchy approach with the body
 - (2) "Now wait a minute Pastor! I thought all Christians were part of the family of God?"
 - (a) True! But each metaphor gets put into practice locally.
 - (b) God gives us the opportunity to live out family life in a local church
 - (c) The fact is you need A body of Christ, to BE the body of Christ - otherwise you are an appendage separated from the body
 - (3) The metaphors are really shadows of the life to come
 - (a) So often we emphasize the life to come in eternity and glamorize it - and believe me it will be beyond our understanding how wonderful it is
 - (b) But what we fail to understand is community life in the church is a shadow of what is coming
 - i) If we do not put our efforts into understanding the metaphors and how they play out in life here, our understanding of eternity is weakened
 - ii) Let me illustrate
 - (1) We are the body - we are interconnected to a point that when one of us hurts, we all should hurt
 - (2) When we get to heaven we will realize in its fullness just how deep this interconnectivity goes
 - (3) We are a family, and we understand the family well because we have families

I Have A Dream Wk2

(a) A father or mother's love in this life is supposed to be deeper and stronger than any bond

(b) We will know fully what a Father's love is like when we arrive in heaven

(4) I could go on, but I think you are getting the idea - pick your metaphor, and what we experience is only a shadow of the reality in heaven

(5) That is why this church life, this church membership is so important

(a) You do not see those results when commitment is absent

(b) Just like in marriage, when you are committed you don't run - you work through to a place of deeper love and commitment

c) Now, in practical reality, does the church always behave in these fashions - do we embody these metaphors so that people feel safe, loved, secure, part of the family, etc.

(1) Truth is we sometimes do not

(2) Personally I think our church does a better than average job

(a) But there is always room for improvement

(b) That's why an exercise that may prove helpful is to meditate on the metaphors of what the church is to be

i) Then honestly hold our church up and see if we are meeting that

ii) If we are, great! Keep up the good work

iii) If we are falling short, we need to uncover why, and work toward being what God has called us to be

III. The final area that we need to address is what are the qualifications for membership

A. If we are going to say that the church holds the keys to affirm or deny membership in the church, then we better know what the qualifications are

B. So in broad form, here are the requirements for membership in the church

1. Faith

a) This is not just "have faith" in some nebulous form

b) It means having faith in Christ

(1) It means being able to answer the same question that Peter answered

(2) Who is Christ: Christ is the Son of God, the Messiah

(a) That is not just the "answer to the question"

I Have A Dream Wk2

(b) That is a life conviction - something that is non-negotiable, and something worth dying for

(c) So please don't think that you can just learn the words and get by

i) In fact Scripture makes it clear that you cannot

ii) You may fool the human beings around, but if this is not the conviction of your heart, God does know, and there will be a day that he will separate the wheat from the tares

c) Just so you understand why this is so important, other religions would say they have faith in Jesus too

(1) Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, even some branches of Protestant

(2) The difference is they do not believe Jesus was God

2. Second requirement is repentance

a) Christianity and therefore church membership begin with faith and repentance

b) Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel." - Mark 1:15

c) Repentance means turning away from sin

(1) You were headed one direction in life, and now you have turned around from that and turned toward Christ

d) Do not confuse repentance with moral perfection

(1) It is not a person's moral perfection that qualifies someone for membership - if so, no offense, but none of us would be members

(2) It's the opposite - they recognize they do not have it in themselves to meet the perfect standard that is set, but Jesus did, and so they trust in Jesus righteousness not their own

3. Third requirement is baptism

a) Mark Dever has said this best, "getting wet is the easiest command Jesus ever gave to follow. It only gets harder from here."

b) Why do we say baptism

(1) Because we saw the example of belief, baptism, membership in the NT

(2) Because it is a public declaration of one's faith and desire to follow Christ

C. I encourage you that if you have not joined the church, please consider it

1. I have not preached this sermon just to build the rolls

a) In fact, that would be the very opposite of what I want

b) I don't want large numbers of people, I want people that understand and are committed to the church (meaning the people of the church, its mission for Christ)

I Have A Dream Wk2

2. You may realize that I have not addressed one area of church membership: church discipline in the punitive sense
 - a) That is by design
 - b) Not that I fear addressing it, but because it is outside the narrow scope of what the driving force of the series is about.

PRAY: Pray for revival in our church and the churches. Pray for a church membership that understands the depth and beauty of what membership means. Pray for people to pursue being an active part of the church in their use of time, and gifts, and resources.