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THE HERALD

Newsletter of the Orrville Grace Brethren Church

July 2020 Family Forums in Review

In our day, Christians leave local churches and go to other local churches as if they have decided to shop at one venue rather than the place where they used to shop. That mindset of consumerism is plaguing the American church. With the recent communication from a number of families who have explained they are leaving, we, as the elders, thought it would be wise to meet together as a church family to discuss how we should respond and process our thoughts in this matter.

July 12th at 11:00 provided that first opportunity. Pastor Ike began by explaining and reviewing what the local church is. The Bible defines a local church as a group of baptized Christians, from a specific geographical region, who meet together regularly for worship fellowship and communion. Christ is the Head of the local church; as the Head He has appointed Elders who lead by example and teach. God also raises up deacons to serve, all the while each and every member is ministering (Eph. 4:1-16).

The local church is the only program God has ordained for this present age. As Paul mentions in Acts 20:28, the church is: “the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” The church is very important to God, and thus should be important to the believer as well.

The Bible gives a number of analogies to describe the relationship of Christians in the local church. One of those illustrations Paul presents in First Corinthians 12 is of a body. We are all connected together. Each member of the church has a special and unique role God has given, which enables the local church to function efficiently and in a way that is honoring to God. Just because some roles are more prominent than others, does not mean the person in that role is more valuable.

The notion that a believer can be walking faithfully with Christ without being connected or a part of a local church is a foreign concept to the New Testament. In fact, every believer needs to be a member so they can follow God’s instruction in Hebrews 13:17: “Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with

grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.” As believers, God wants us to be connected to a group of believers in order to love and encourage one another (Heb. 10:24-25).

Which brings us to the question: Is there ever a biblical basis for leaving a church? The short answer is: Yes. Before we explain why, it is important to make the distinction between leaving and being sent. Pastor Josh and Autumn were sent from our church to Papua New Guinea; they didn’t leave. The same could be said of Pastor Ethan Kallberg. God was calling these members to serve Him in another location, and they obediently followed. They were sent, which is different from a person just making the decision to leave to try something different by way of unilateral decision.

There are some occasions when God would direct a believer to leave a church. For instance, if the group of which they are a part is not following the New Testament definition of a church. In other words, the group does not teach, preach or practice the Bible. Or, if the elders or leaders of the church are not qualified, based on the criteria the Holy Spirit lays out for us in First Timothy 3 and Titus 1. These are very broad examples of occasions when God would direct a believer to leave a church.

However, most Americans today do not use any of those reasons for leaving a church. Instead, they mention ideas like: “I feel like I don’t belong;” or “I feel like God is leading me elsewhere.” They will often back up their decision by stating they have a “peace” about what they are doing. Many times these be-

lievers are trusting in their own heart; the “peace” they are feeling may simply be the relief from conflict or hardship they have experienced as they have struggled with their decision to leave. Walking away from commitments and relationships dishonors the Lord and grieves the body which they leave behind. They do not have the peace that Paul describes in Colossians 3:15 (which is plural), because those they leave behind do not have the same peace.

After many questions, we ended for the day and decided we would continue on the following Sunday (July 19th). That day at 11:00 in the double room, we began with the question: How then does God want you and I to grapple with our own feelings and thinking when someone chooses to leave the local church? Pastor Ike explained that it is so important that we know the facts. As Proverbs 18:17 says: “The first to plead his case seems just until another comes and examines him.” It is so easy to assume we know the whole story, when we have only received half of it; or, none of it at all. We must not pass along juicy news. Instead, we need to learn what is actually going on.

It is important also to ask the Lord to search our own hearts (Ps. 139:23-24). If we discover that we may have contributed to the problem, we need to go to the person (Matt. 5:23-24) and seek their forgiveness and begin the process of reconciliation (Eph. 4:32; James 5:16). Paul writes in Romans 12:18: “If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.” God wants each of us to do everything we can to live at peace with those around

us, especially our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Another important principle to keep in mind is found in Philippians 4:8: “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.” We must not allow ourselves to dwell on untrue or negative thoughts about the person who is leaving. As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 10:5 we must take “every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.” If you are struggling with this, please come to talk to one of the elders, or another mature brother or sister. God desires for us to help one another as we journey down this road (Rom. 15:14).

Finally, as God gives us the opportunity to interact with those who have left, we should be friendly and loving to these individuals. We should have no qualms in saying that we miss someone. Beforehand and at the time of meeting, we should be prayerful and willing to address unresolved issues, which is in their best interest and for the glory of God.

Once again, if we personally are aware of hurt or unresolved issues, we should offer to schedule a time and place to address any unresolved issues with the goal being to live at peace, as far as it depends on us individually, with one another (Rom. 12:18). This is in accord with the Bible which instructs us in many places to not overlook issues or sins which should be addressed (Psalm 141:5; Prov. 27:5-6; 28:23; Luke 17:3; Romans 15:14; 1

Thess. 5:14). If we obey Jesus and love each other as He loved us (John 13:34), then we will relate to one another as Jesus has called us to, which includes confronting sin in love (Matt. 5:23-24; Matt. 16:23; Mark 8:1-21; Luke 24:25; John 21:15-23; Gal. 6:1-2; James 5:19-20 et.al).

In the end, we all agreed that open communication and talking about issues is very important. It is so easy to just sweep things under the rug, and ignore them. Instead, God desires for us to work through the different issues that arise. Paul’s words in 1 Thessalonians 5:14-15 are not just for elders. Every believer should heed the Holy Spirit inspired direction: “We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.” A few voiced interest in having ongoing “Family Forums” because this time was helpful to them. With that in mind, we have scheduled a Family Forum for September 20th. If you have a topic which you would want to discuss together, please submit your topic to one of the elders.

If you have further questions, we as the elders would love to talk with you more. Please contact us at any time to schedule a time when we can sit down and talk together. Let’s make it our goal, as Paul writes in Ephesians 4:3, to be “...diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

FUNNIES

A couple took their two-year-old daughter to a home-improvement store. The girl soon got tired of walking, so her father let her ride on his shoulders. As he walked, she started pulling on his hair. Although he asked her calmly to stop several times, she kept on. Getting annoyed, he scolded, "Katie! Stop that!"

"But Daddy," she replied. "I'm just trying to get my gum back."

Bored during a long flight, an eminent scholar leaned over and woke up the sleeping man next to him to ask if he would like to play a game. "I'll ask you a question," the scholar explained, "and if you don't know the answer, you pay me \$5. Then you ask me a question, and if I don't know the answer, I'll pay you \$50."

When the man agreed to play, the scholar asked, "What's the distance from the earth to the moon?" Flummoxed, the man handed him \$5. "Ha," said the scholar. "It's 238,857 miles. Now it's your turn."

The man was silent for a few moments. Then he asked, "What goes up a hill with three legs and comes down with four?"

Puzzled the scholar racked his brains for an hour—but to no avail. Finally, he took out his wallet and handed over \$50. "Okay, what is the answer," the scholar

asked.

The man said, "I don't know," pulled out a \$5 bill, handed it to the scholar and went back to sleep.

"In our family," a little girl told her teacher, "everybody marries relatives. My father married my mother, my uncle married my aunt, and the other day I found out that my grandmother married my grandfather."

An enthusiastic lady told a group of friends of the opportunity she had had to apply the knowledge she had acquired in her First Aid class. "It was wonderful," she said, "it was so fortunate that I had the training. I was crossing Fifth Avenue at Fifty-seventh Street and heard a crash behind me. I turned around and saw a poor man who had been struck by a taxicab. He had a compound fracture of the leg, was bleeding terribly, was unconscious and seemed to have a fractured skull. Then all my First Aid came back to me; and I stooped right down and put my head between my legs to keep myself from fainting!"

If you must make mistakes, it will be more to your credit if you make a new one each time.