
“Our Core Values, Pt. 1”

ACTS 20:28-30

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AT A GLANCE

We all have core values. They drive us. They are the reason we do what we do. We exercise because we value our health. We save money because we value preparedness. In a similar way, Wildwood Church has core values that cause us to do what we do. We invite you to watch this sermon and the next to see what our core values are!

INTRODUCTION

Last week in my notes I had a paragraph that I could not get to so I would like to share it with you today. “When a church’s leaders are doing what they are called to do as biblical elders, and when the members are doing what they’re called to do, it is a force in the world. It transforms families. It impacts the community around it. It’s doing so much more than simply existing.” This was in light of what Paul said in Ephesians 4:11-16. The Lord gave the church it’s leaders to equip the saints for the work of ministry. So, you have shepherds, and you have saints. Paul says, *“when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.” Ephesians 4:16*

That was how I described our strategy last week – equip the saints and send them out. I want to note, again, that in Ephesians 4 we read of shepherds and saints, or elders and members. These two things are what I want to speak of today. They represent two of our four core values. Biblical eldership and meaningful membership.

It is because we believe THE Gospel and because it is our responsibility as a church to protect and propel the Gospel that we value biblical eldership and meaningful membership. Let’s read **Acts 20:28-30** and I’ll tell you what I mean.

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

This is a sober warning to elders to faithfully and carefully shepherd the flock of God in which the Holy Spirit had made them overseers. The warning was given to *elders* and it concerned the shepherding of *their* specific, identifiable church. They knew who they were supposed to shepherd.

A PLURALITY OF QUALIFIED MEN

From this passage we can glean a few things that help us understand what biblical eldership is. First, we believe that Jesus intends every church to be led by a plurality of elders. When elders are mentioned in the New Testament, there’s plurality. **Pay careful attention to yourselves**, plural.

It’s what Paul intended. *Titus 1:5* “*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.*”

It's also what Paul practiced. *Acts 14:23* "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."

ABLE TO TEACH

We believe biblical eldership begins with understanding that a church is to be led by biblically qualified men, plural. One of those qualifications, the only one that distinguishes elders and deacons is the ability to teach the Word of God. "Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach," *1 Timothy 3:2*

It's not a bonus to have an elder who can teach the Word; it's a qualification. In fact, it's the one thing elders, by qualification, are required to do outside of managing their own home well. It is the elder's task in the church. Why?

Because of the threat of false teaching. Note the warning, **fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.** The best way to protect against false teaching is right teaching. Rightly dividing the Word of God. Having several men who can rightly divide the Word of God and giving them equal authority helps protect the flock from being led astray. Teaching the Word is the priority of an elder.

We get this priority not just from the list of qualifications, but most notably from Peter's response to a potential noble distraction. Peter was there with Jesus in John 21 when Jesus asked him three times, do you love me? Peter responded in the affirmative three times. Jesus responded to each of these with "feed my sheep," or "feed my lambs."

In Acts 6, the church was over 3000 people and there were logistical issues they had to deal with. The Greek widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food and a complaint rose to leadership.

Ok, Peter, what are you going to do? Jesus told you to feed His sheep three times. Will you feed the widows? No, that's not what Peter did. He had the church present seven dignified, godly men and entrusted them to feed the widows. Peter would feed them the Word of God. "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." *Acts 6:4*

SET AN EXAMPLE WORTHY OF BEING FOLLOWED

Peter rightly understood that the priority of a shepherd, what Jesus meant when He told him to feed His sheep, is prayerfully teaching the Word of God. But it is not as though shepherds can isolate themselves and drop in on the flock on Sunday morning and teach the Bible and pop back into isolation. The bible leaves no room for pastors who will not practice what they preach. Our calling is to lead by example.

In *1 Peter 5:3*, Peter exhorts his fellow elders saying, "not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock."

Paul also told Titus in *Titus 2:6* "Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works."

And again in *Philippians 3:17*, Paul says, "Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us."

Set an example worthy of being followed. Practice what you preach. The primary task of an elder is to faithfully teach the Word of God, that's true. But it is impossible to faithfully teach the Word of God without living by it yourself.

Elders are going to answer for this someday. James warns, *“Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.” James 3:1*

AS THOSE WHO WILL GIVE ACCOUNT

Everyone who teaches the Word of God is going to answer for how they handled the Word of God and implied is that they are going to give account for how they led the people of God through the teaching of His Word. This is the heart behind the charge in Hebrews 13:17.

Hebrews 13:17 “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”

This is another sober warning. The leaders, according to verse 7 are those who “teach you the Word of God.” This is a warning to every elder who accepts the title with no desire to faithfully teach the Word and shepherd the souls of those in their flock. These men will stand before Jesus, and they will give account.

Those who execute the duties of the office faithfully, humbly, willingly, selflessly will receive an unfading crown of glory. *1 Peter 5:4 “And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”* What a magnificent thought!

It should give you a good deal of peace to know your elders are going to answer to Jesus; He doesn't miss anything, and He isn't fooled. But on a more practical level, it is of no benefit to you that your elders groan. The weight of ministering the Word of God to the people of God knowing you will give account to the Son of God is heavy enough. The author says it's better that you help them with their task for your own sake. It's no advantage to you to make it more difficult.

WHO ARE ELDERS ACCOUNTABLE FOR?

This accountability to Jesus forms part of the basis for the next core value, meaningful membership. For whom will the elders give account? And how does the church protect the Gospel and ensure only the true Gospel is being preached?

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God. Acts 20:28

Who is this flock that I'm supposed to be overseeing? Am I responsible to oversee every soul that walks in the door? Am I responsible for the souls of unbelievers?

I take Peter at his word, and I believe Jesus is really going to hold me accountable for shepherding the souls of the people of Wildwood. But who are they? That's where meaningful membership comes into play. Membership in a church serves as an identifier for whom the elders of that church are responsible. Why? Simple, there's mutual agreement.

I have a desire to meet everyone's needs. Believe me, I hate the idea of turning anyone down, member or non-member. But if someone does not relate to me as their pastor in a credible way, how can I possibly shepherd them biblically and be accountable for them biblically? Membership is that credible expression of mutual agreement, I am your pastor and I, along with the other elders, am responsible for shepherding your soul.

DOCTRINE MATTERS

The elders believe it is important we know for whom we will give account. It matters to us. You matter to us. We are going to give account for shepherding your souls. But church membership is not only about defining this accountability relationship, it is also an affirmation and protection of the

church's doctrinal beliefs, chiefly the Gospel. What we believe matters. Not every doctrine issue warrants dividing over, but some do.

There are some things we can agree to disagree about; things the Bible doesn't give us clear teaching on. We call these things open-handed issues. We can disagree about alcohol and dancing and movies and music and the end times and election and tithing. These are things that if we disagree, we'll both eventually agree on it in Heaven. Differences here are known as distinctives.

Then there are things that the Bible is clear about and if we disagree, one of us is going to be looking around Heaven wondering where the other one is. These are closed-handed doctrines. Disagreeing on these keeps someone from eternal life because they deny the Gospel. It has eternal consequence. Differences here are more than distinctives, they are as heresies.

Closed-handed issues include doctrines like the inerrancy of scripture, the Trinity, the deity of Christ and His sinless life, the literal death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, sin, & the justification of the saints by faith alone in Christ alone by God's grace alone.

Membership in a church helps you know what we believe and helps us know you believe what we believe so we can all do what we're called to do, protect and propel the Gospel. This is really important because any deviation from the Gospel represents a damnable offense. Paul says in *Galatians 1:8*, "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed."

Some deviations of the Gospel are not so obvious. I think of the prosperity gospel as one of the most deceptive. It teaches that God's favor depends upon you. Financial and physical health are evidence that one is in right standing with the Lord and evidence of your abundant faith. Suffering, sickness, and poverty reflect an absence of faith.

FALSE GOSPELS

Certainly, the preachers of the prosperity gospel make it rich, but they do so by fleecing the flock. I cannot help but connect the prosperity gospel preachers with the shepherds of Israel who consumed rather than feeding the sheep of God.

"Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep." Ezekiel 34:2-3

David W. Jones says about the prosperity gospel, "Whether they're talking about the Abrahamic covenant, the atonement, giving, faith, or prayer, prosperity teachers turn the relationship between God and man into a *quid pro quo* transaction."

The gospel teaches us that everything we have is a gift of grace, that suffering is a normal part of the Christian experience, and that the poor are blessed. The prosperity gospel denies all of these.

The prosperity gospel is not the only modern-day false gospel. There is also what can be called the Queer gospel. It denies the sinfulness of homosexuality and various forms of sexual sin and it's being widely embraced not only in mainline denominations that have abandoned biblical Christianity for decades, but even evangelical churches. At the center of this gospel is love of self. It affirms whatever one feels and believes to be true and it denies the Word of God.

If we deny that sexual sin is sin, what becomes of justification? It is nullified. And of repentance? No need! If human sexuality is innate, meaning it is not a choice, as the Queer gospel posits, what becomes of sanctification? Again, nullified. Jesus' and Paul's repeated warnings to the sexually immoral are moot, irrelevant. This is not the Gospel.

There is a Gospel for Queer people. There is good news for people struggling with the sin of homosexuality and gender dysphoria and with any other form of sexual immorality, like pornography, and every other sin for that matter. It is the Gospel of grace. It is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. *“for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...” Romans 1:16*

THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

The Gospel teaches that our wretched sinful state is in fact innate, in every form and expression. It is not only our sexuality, but our pride, our selfishness, our anger, our jealousy, our wicked mouths, all of it is innate. No one has to choose to be a sinner. We're born that way. It teaches that we all fall short of the glory of God. None is righteous, no not one.

And it teaches that the wages of sin is death. We all deserve God's just wrath. That's what we've earned. The Gospel teaches that the Holy Spirit must give us new birth, a fresh start, make us totally new from the inside out. “Unless you are born again you cannot see the kingdom of God.” Jesus said.

The Gospel teaches that we are saved by faith; faith in the Son of God – that He is who He says He is and that I am who He says I am. It teaches that saving faith, which comes from God at our regeneration, will result in life transformation as the Holy Spirit conforms us to the image of the Son of God.

That's the Gospel. And church, how do we know you believe the true Gospel, the biblical Gospel? And how do you know our elders believe the true Gospel? Membership. It is our collective responsibility to protect and propel this gospel. Our best effort is made through biblical eldership and meaningful membership. These are two of Wildwood's core values.