

Beyond These Four Walls

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Introduction.

- A. In the Lord's church of the 21st century, we tend to spend a lot of time focusing on correct practice in the church, particularly in the assembly. We are very scrupulous about attending to each detail of God's word. We make sure that our church worship is what He has commanded, that our church leadership is set up in the way He desires, and that our church finances are used according to His wishes.
- B. Now, there's absolutely nothing wrong with this. Indeed, if we are truly citizens of heaven, this is what we need to do. We need to make sure that we have authority for every church practice. However, we must also make sure that our spiritual lives are not focused only on the assembly. It is absolutely true that in order to be pleasing to God, we must assemble with the saints, sing, pray, study, give, and take the Lord's supper. However, that is not all it takes to be a Christian. If that's all we're doing, we're not doing enough.
- C. Indeed, just like most of our lives are spent outside the assembly, so too most of the New Testament is dedicated to telling us how we need to live outside the assembly. Sometimes, we treat those passages as second-class Scripture that we can safely ignore as long as we don't have a piano in the building, but that is absolutely not the case. It is vital not merely that we have righteous worship, but that we lead righteous lives. Let's turn to God's word this evening, then, to learn what He expects of us beyond these four walls.

I. Godly Living.

- A. The first, and perhaps most obvious, thing that God wants to see from us outside of the assembly is godly living. We can look at this in a very specific way, of course, but let's try to take a big-picture view tonight. Paul explains the first half of godly living in Colossians 3:1-3. The first half of godly living is godly mindset. We need to be people who seek the things which are above. This is true in two different senses. In the first place, we seek the things above by literally making our lives a quest for heaven. Ever had something that was really on your mind? It could be a good thing, like being madly in love with somebody; it could be a bad thing, like some family tragedy. When there's something on our minds like that, we can think about other things, we can do other things, but when our minds are at ease, they always return to that one central thought. If we're seeking the things above, we're training our minds so that when they're at rest, they always think of heaven.
- B. Second, we seek the things above when we desire the works of God rather than the works of the world. This is not quite the same thing as seeking heaven, but it's close. Heaven is the end; obedience to God's will is the means. When we seek the things above in this way, we love righteousness instead of loving evil. We think about pure things instead of corrupt things. We discipline our minds for the purpose of godliness rather than allowing ourselves to lapse into the laziness of wickedness. We follow the Spirit rather than the flesh.
- C. In addition to this, though, Paul describes a second component of godly living in Ephesians 5:1. He tells us to be imitators of God as dear children. Isn't that a neat thought? We've all seen kids imitate their parents. Some young father scratches his chin or hitches up his pants, and five seconds later his four-year-old son is doing the same thing. We need to be that way with our heavenly Father, and this has two components. First, we need to study our Father the way that little boys do theirs. They just watch; we, on the other hand, have to study God through His creation, through His nature as it is revealed in the Old Testament, but above all, as He is displayed in His Son. Every commandment we have is ultimately a revelation about how to be like God. Second, though, we have to do those things, not grudgingly or halfheartedly, but out of a burning desire to bring God into our lives. Those little kids are funny, but ultimately, being like Dad is what they want.

II. Care for One Another.

- A. Just as important as this emphasis on godly living, though, is the care that we have for one another. Every once in a while, as I'm preparing a sermon or Bible-class material, I'll run into something that makes me rethink Christianity, and this is one. Look at these passages about how we're to relate to one another:

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| 1. Have peace with. Mk. 9:50 | 10. Submit to. Eph. 5:21 |
| 2. Love. Jn. 13:34 | 11. Daily exhort. Heb. 3:13 |
| 3. Be kindly affectionate to. . . . Rom. 12:10 | 12. Do not speak evil of. Jas. 4:11 |
| 4. Be of the same mind toward. . . Rom. 12:16 | 13. Do not grumble against. Jas. 5:9 |
| 5. Receive. Rom. 15:7 | 14. Confess your trespasses to. . . Jas. 5:16 |
| 6. Have the same care for. 1 Cor. 12:25 | 15. Pray for. Jas. 5:16 |
| 7. Bear with. Eph. 4:2 | 16. Have compassion for. 1 Pet. 3:8 |
| 8. Be kind to. Eph. 4:32 | 17. Be hospitable to. 1 Pet. 4:9 |
| 9. Forgive. Eph. 4:32 | |

- B. Now, that's a massive number of Scriptures, and it's just the tip of the iceberg. Indeed, it's probably fair to say that we have more Biblical instruction about how Christians are to treat each other outside of the assembly than they do about how to behave inside it. Why is that? Is it because God wants us to be extra-special good during our meeting potlucks, or is it because He expects Christians to spend A LOT of time together?
- C. To answer this question, let's look at the Jerusalem church as described in Acts 2:44-46. What picture of New-Testament Christianity does this paint? Did the Christians of the first century see each other for four hours a week and then go home, or did they share their lives with one another? Acts 2:44 answers the question, when it tells us that they were TOGETHER. I suspect they would be horrified at how little we are together.
- D. Now, to this, there's a little voice in almost all our heads that cries out, "I'd like to spend more time with other Christians, but I just don't have the time to spend." But is that really true? One of the more interesting studies I've read about recently compared the leisure time available to Americans 50 years ago versus the amount of time we have today. The study concluded that Americans of today actually have MORE time, not less, than they used to. So what gives? There's one simple answer. It begins with T and ends with "elevision." The average American watches more than 20 hours a week, and that's why we don't have time.
- E. Now, I'm certainly convinced of the corrupting nature of TV, but it may well be that the worst effect of TV on our lives is that it isolates us from our brethren. My wife loves to watch Rachael Ray's cooking show, even though she rarely makes any of her recipes, so I sometimes joke with her that Rachael isn't so much a cooking-show host as she is my wife's electronic best friend. Now, I don't mean anything by that, but isn't there a grain of truth to that joke for all of us? We don't invest ourselves in friendships with our brethren because we've already got our friends on TV. As far as we're concerned, they're wonderful friends. They're always entertaining, they're never in a bad mood, they always have time for us, and all they ask in return is that we don't change the channel during commercials. It's sure a lot easier than dealing with real live imperfect human beings. The problem, folks, is what we don't get from our TV friends. They don't give us opportunity, encouragement, or reason to serve God, and that is disastrous.
- F. So what should we do about it? Toss our TV's out the window forever? That actually might not be a bad idea, but I'm going to propose something a bit more moderate. Let's all of us resolve, for the next year, say, that each week, we're going to take one hour of time that we would spend watching TV, and spend that time with our brothers and sisters in Christ instead. We can eat dinner with some folks at church we don't know very well. We can go visit a shut-in or two. We can go to a ball game, have a Bible study, or do any number of other things. It's a simple thing, really, just one hour a week, but I suspect that one measly hour a week is enough to transform any church. Let's dedicate ourselves not to TV, but to our brethren in Christ.

III. Evangelism.

- A. However, there's more to the Christian walk than just godly living and caring for other Christians. Outside these four walls, we also need to take part in evangelism. Now, we've certainly done a lot of discussion of evangelism recently, but let's refocus ourselves on this objective anyway. Just like anything else that all Christians are supposed to do, evangelism isn't something that just happens. It isn't something that will magically occur without any effort on our parts. Instead, evangelism is a skill. If we want to be good at evangelism as individuals and as a church, we have to care about it, work at it, and learn how to do it.
- B. One passage that encourages us in this direction is 1 Peter 3:15. Let's spend a moment looking at this commandment and what it can teach us. To begin with, before we talk about the "make a defense" part, we have to look at just what we're defending—the hope that is in us. Brethren, as Christians, we have something that nobody else has. We have the hope of eternal life. As long as we continue in the grace of God, He guarantees that we will live forever. We should care about this more than we care about anything else in this world or outside of it, because it is simply that important. Indeed, the hope that we have is so important that it should motivate us to share it with everyone we know, because that's what you do with good news.
- C. Second, though, this passage tells us about the defense we're supposed to make. To begin with, this should teach us that we can't have lives that undermine our defense before we start. A defense attorney can be the best in the world, but if his client gives a full confession to the police before the trial, there's nothing the attorney can do. In the same way, no matter how much we know about the Bible and how skillfully we present it, if everyone we talk to knows we're hypocrites, we'll never win any souls. Second, though, this defense is something that we need to be ready to make. We have to know what we believe and why we believe it. We have to know at least enough about God's word to get somebody started.
- D. Once we have the knowledge we need to save souls, though, we have to take care in how we talk to those who are lost. Because we know we have the truth, it's easy for us to get puffed up. My great-grandmother, who was a member of the church 75 years ago, was famous for asking door-to-door salesmen about their religious background and then, if they gave the wrong answer, asking them if they knew they were going to hell. We must not just speak the truth, but also speak the truth in love. Look at Paul's words in 2 Timothy 2:24-25. It's not enough that we're able to teach. We also have to be gentle, peaceable, patient, and humble.

Conclusion. If you haven't been living in the way that God desires, now is your opportunity to repent.