

## Five Antioch Values, Part Two

- Matthew 28:18-20
- I heard about a church in our community a couple of weeks ago that will not allow people to join unless they don't have a TV in their home. The women cannot work outside the home or wear makeup or cut their hair. Men also cannot wear short sleeve shirts, and one man had to turn down a job where the requirement was short sleeves to prevent the machinery from grabbing a long sleeve and pulling the man into the machine. I said to the person who told me this that it sounds like that church is known mostly for what they are against. Last week we began a discussion of five things we are for at Antioch, five distinctives, five values, that have shaped us as followers of Jesus. We have talked about biblical worship and expository preaching. Let's continue today with two more of those distinctives: a commitment to missions, and a plurality of elders.
- **Commitment to Missions**
- As we heard Jeremy read a few minutes ago, Jesus' last words to the disciples before he ascended are what is called the Great Commission. As we go, we are to make disciples. That happens only through the Gospel, which is "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes."
- I would submit to you that the **melodic line of the book of Acts is the expansion of the Gospel**. The victorious march of the Gospel from Jerusalem to the uttermost parts of the earth. Jesus said this to his disciples in Luke 24:46-47 – "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem." That's the what we are to do. Here's the how, as Jesus said in Acts 1:8: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." We have received the Holy Spirit upon conversion, and he has given us power to be witnesses wherever we go.
- I love that wonderful story in Acts 13, from which we chose the name of this church. The leaders of the church at Antioch were worshiping the Lord, and I suggest that genuine worship always leads to mission. The reason for mission is that God may be glorified and worshiped by more people! The Spirit said to Antioch's elders, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Thus began the greatest missionary work the world has ever seen. And it continues with us, at THIS Antioch, and with every church that is committed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- We encourage every person at Antioch to be involved in personal evangelism (being a witness) and discipleship in obedience to the Great Commission. We also encourage everyone to be involved in local and foreign missions in three ways: give, go, and send. I will combine give and send, since they work together. The easiest way is to give. Nearly one-third of your tithe in 2022, 31.4%, went to missions. One third of our budget goes to support 11 different local missions and 9 or 10 different foreign missions. Your giving also helps people get to the mission field for a short-term trip, like the 35 who went to Kentucky recently and will share a report with us next week. That's the sending part: your giving helps send your fellow church members to go and serve on the mission field. Your giving helped send me and several others in the church at various times to Moldova in the past 7 years, and dozens of churches and villages and hundreds of men were taught from the Word what it means to be a prophet, priest, protector, and provider in their homes. Your giving has sent numerous teams to Bocachica to dig latrines and provide water filters and teach at the church on the island. Or to Mississippi to help rebuild after Katrina. Your giving helped a team from Antioch build houses in Juarez, Mexico. And we could go on and on about trips to Haiti, Kenya (where Caleb and Celia are now), South Africa, Newcastle in the UK, Berlin, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, and more. When we give to the church and help provide for ministries around the world, and help send people to serve them, we are storing up treasures in heaven! So, give and send!
- But also, do your best to GO. As the team will testify on July 9, to go is to grow. It would be my desire that every person at Antioch goes on a mission trip sometime, at least once, and the sooner the better.

That was my desire for my children, and each one went with me at least once to Africa. Each one raised his or her own support and saw God provide for them, usually more than they needed so they could help others with the surplus or leave it with people in need on the mission field. It was a tremendous faith-builder as they had heard me quote Hudson Taylor many times who said, "God's work, done God's way, will never lack God's supply."

- The fruit of short-term trips could be listed this way. 1. They give you a world vision. You see the needs of the world which usually make our needs pale in comparison. 2. They give you a bigger God vision. You see God is at work because God really does love the world, and he invites us to love it, too. 3. They give you a bigger prayer vision. For both of the first two reasons! To *know* the people there gives us a greater desire to pray for them here. 4. They open your heart and your wallet. People who have been to the field want to give more. That leads us to a fourth value...
- **Plurality of elders**
- So many of us grew up in churches with solo leadership that it is part of our ecclesiology and very difficult to shake. We think the church ought to operate like a corporation: one person at the top, the CEO, and everybody else is under him. Or, there is a board of elders or a board of deacons, or a consistory, or whatever terminology we want to call it, but it is still a hierarchy, and one man (or in some churches, one woman) has final authority and can overrule all the rest.
- But that is not the New Testament model of leadership for the local church. Paul instructed Titus to stay in Crete and ***set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you*** (Titus 1:5). There in Titus 1 and in 1 Timothy 3, Paul gives the qualifications for elders, and he uses the plural in chapter 5 when he writes, "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor..." In the book of Acts, we read about Paul stopping off in Miletus, on his way to Jerusalem, where he knew he would be handed over to the authorities and eventually end up in Rome. This was his last chance to minister to the church he had loved so much that he stayed there longer than he stayed anywhere else: the church at Ephesus. So, what does Paul do in Miletus? ***He sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.*** (Acts 20:17) Finally, one of the most compelling passages that hold up this New Testament model of leadership by a council of elders in every church is found in Acts 14:23. Paul and Barnabas are on their first missionary journey, these premier church planters and perhaps the greatest missionary team ever. They went back to three cities they had preached in: Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, and preached again. And, verse 23 reads, ***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.***
- In each of these passages, we see the same thing. God has ordained a biblical model for church leadership, a council of elders. And I would submit to you that healthy, vital churches that are achieving what God has called them to, without exception have healthy, vital leadership. What are elders? Your translation may say bishop, or overseer, or shepherd. But it's the same thing. The Jews preferred the term, ***presbuteros***, which means mature, dignified, wise, even "gray-haired." The Greeks preferred the word ***episkopos***, and that means "overseer" or one who takes responsibility. But they are used interchangeably in the New Testament because an elder must be both: a mature believer, and one who leads the flock and takes care of them. One denotes the dignity of the office and the other the duties.
- Paul lists the qualifications for elders, and we have looked at that extensively when going through 1 Timothy and Titus, but I think the last thing he said in Titus 1 may be the most important, because it is the ground upon which elders must stand if they are going to faithfully lead the flock. "He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught." (Titus 1:9) An elder or pastor may have a great marriage, solid kids, and good character in the community, known far and wide for their kind words and good deeds. But if his teaching undermines the authority of God's Word, he is the blind leading the blind. If what he holds firm to is "peace at any price," or "a rejection of the authority of the Bible that transcends culture," then he is not holding firm to the trustworthy word as taught, and he will not be

able to “give instruction in sound doctrine.” Nor will he be able to “rebuke those who contradict it,” for he contradicts it himself!

- I cannot remember where I read this many years ago, but I love it: The Dakota Indian tribe was known for its common sense wisdom. They said, If you discover you are riding a dead horse, dismount. Here’s how this basic wisdom has been re-worked for church life in America; think of the dead horse as unbiblical thinking. Some churches do nothing about the dead horse, and simply change riders, or pastors. Others say: “this is way we’ve always ridden dead horses.” Some churches form a committee to study the horse in order to see how dead it really is. Liberal churches reject the notion that unbiblical thinking IS a dead horse and merely re-classify the dead horse as “living impaired.” The ONLY way to address the dead horse of unbiblical thinking is to hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught. That’s what elders must do.
- Let me suggest five reasons, as we close, why having a plurality of elders to lead the church is a strong ingredient for that church’s health.
- **Accountability.** Godly elders hold each other accountable, including the pastor, to live, teach, and lead faithfully. That gives little chance for one man to lord his authority over a congregation.
- **Safety.** The Bible says there is safety and victory in a multitude of counselors (Prov. 11:14; 24:6).
- **Balance.** No one man has all the gifts that are necessary to build up the church. The plurality of elders brings a balance of strengths and gifts that work together to equip the saints for the work of ministry.
- **Shoulders.** God never intended for the cares of a congregation to be on the shoulders of one man. That responsibility is to be shared. There’s a reason why the average stay of a pastor in America is only 3 years. When Paul met with the elders of the Ephesian church, he warned them that wolves would be coming. Wolves hunt in packs. Solo pastors usually don’t survive those.
- **Examples.** Gregg Harris likes to say, “the church runs on regular.” A plurality of elders demonstrates to the church that the work of ministry is not reserved only for the select few or the seminary-trained. Make no mistake. Godly women are examples as well, and vital to the health and fruitfulness of the church!
- **Prayer**
- **Communion**
- **Greet One Another**