

09/25/11

## Living Life Together by Discerning God's Will as a Family

- one of the interesting aspects of getting older is that things that were very familiar to you are foreign to the next generation...and things that are very familiar to them make zero sense to you...
- for example, I mentioned that a couple of weeks ago I spoke in chapel where I attended Bible college...
- it struck me how different my experience was from theirs...
- for example...we had no computers...
  - so when you typed a paper, you typed a paper...
  - which meant, you inserted a sheet of paper in a typewriter and hoped and prayed you didn't make a mistake...
  - and I was explaining that you Pastor Green the other day, and even he started on the – but you could just hit the erase button...
  - and I just shook my head – for one thing...it's not like every typewriter had that feature...and many of my professors would not allow corrections on the page of any kind...
  - so when you made a mistake, you ripped that sheet of paper out, and started over...
    - I learned some very interesting vocabulary words when I was up late at night with my friends working on papers...
  - of course there was no e-mail – some kids can't even imagine that...well, then – send a text on your I-phone...
  - no we wrote letters back home...with paper and pens and stamps and cursive writing...while dinosaurs roamed the earth...
  - and long distance calls – that was a luxury that was incredibly expensive...
- I could illustrate the differences in all sorts of ways...but maybe this is another time where a picture is worth a thousand words...
- do you realize how scandalous it is that an entire generation of young men are growing up without having any idea what this is?...
- little boys are growing up all around us who don't even understand good toys---they have no experience with a toy that's not electronic...
- let me take a stab at addressing this societal flaw...
  - the way rock-em sock-em robots worked was – you would punch the other robot repeatedly...and it would look like he was going to fall over...but then he would spring back to life...
  - that was the whole beauty of it...you thought you had a knock-out but he just kept coming back...
- some of you movie aficionados know that this game became part of our culture's most important films...
- now, I'm sure I'll get a few e-mails about not promoting gratuitous violence...but that is the exact picture that came to my mind as I studied our passage of Scripture this morning...
- because it seems like the church keeps getting knocked down...
  - you have the scandal of Ananias and Saphira lying to their church family about a gift they had supposed given to help those who were poor in chapter 5...and you think, how can the church withstand such hypocrisy?...but it did...

- then you had the argument from the Hellenistic Jews in chapter 6 about how their widows were supposedly being neglected in the daily administration of food...and again you think – the church is going to blow up...but the church family came together and solved the problem and that's when the office of deacon was instituted...
- then you have the first deacon Stephen being put to death...
- then you have incredible persecution by this madman named Saul...and multiple imprisonments of key leaders and on and on...
  - but what happens every time?...the church keeps bouncing back up...no one is knocking their block off...
  - it's almost like it's of divine origin and power...
  - it's almost like Jesus Christ is really behind the whole process...he was serious about this promise He made to build His church...whereas even the gates of hell would not be able to stand against it...
- in today's passage...the issue is a disagreement over God's will for those who are coming into the church...
  - and it is a sharp disagreement that has the potential to blow the young church wide open...
  - watching how the church responds gives us great insight into **Living Life Together by Discerning God's Will as a Family...**
  - with that in mind, please open your Bible to Acts 15...page 105 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...
    - last week we saw the beginning of the very first missionary journey...
    - and what we observed was the centrality of the local church...
      - the apostles could have done this on their own...
      - so it was important to note that this great body of believers...the church at Antioch...men and women who are already busily serving and fasting together...were the ones who were used by God to send out the very first missionaries in all of human history...
    - that's why we emphasized the central principle that God is mediating His plan and program in and through the local church...the whole body of men and women serving together as opposed to just a small group of people...
    - we're going to see exact same principle illustrated again...this time when the will of God needs to be discerned...
  - **read Acts 15:1-35**...so we're talking about Living Life Together by Discerning God's Will as a Family...and with the time we have remaining, let's think about **3 observations about the way to determine what God desires.**
- I. There Will Always be a Variety of Ideas about God's Will for you/the church.**
  - the apostle Paul would later make a fascinating comment to the church at Corinth when he said...**1 Corinthians 11:19 - For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.**
  - in other words – what we're seeing in Acts 15 is always happening in the church...and it's always happening in the individual lives of God's people...an ongoing chorus of voices asking you to believe and act on what they are saying...
  - now, what was specifically happening in their setting?
- A. In their case – the Judaizers.**
  - these were people who believed that salvation was at least partially by works...
  - it's a form of legalism – earning merit before God by what you do...
  - and their brand was really clear...

- **Acts 15:1 - Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”**
  - that same view came up later in the congregational meeting...
  - **Acts 15:5 - But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses.”**
  - see, some people just don't get grace...it's too good to be true...
  - they also don't get the fact that the Bible is just as thick as God intended for it to be...that's why we're commanded not to add anything to the Word...you're not doing God or anyone else a favor when you do that...and in this case – it's an incredible offense to the finished work on the cross...
    - when Jesus said – It is finished – He was serious about that...
    - when God rent the veil in the temple from top to bottom...and then miraculously raised His Son from the dead – that was as powerful as demonstration as possible that the price Jesus paid was fully accepted for our sin...
  - but the point is – here's the church with someone punching them – trying to knock them out by dividing God's people with false doctrine...
  - and this comes up throughout the NT...
  - **Philippians 3:2 - Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision;**
    - when Paul uses terminology like that...it tells you how serious all of this is...
  - **Galatians 3:1 - You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?**
    - protecting the gospel from man-made ideas is an important aspect of our task...
    - Paul even later warned the Ephesians...
  - **Acts 20:29-30 - “I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.**
- so what do we do with all these ideas that are trying to knock our blocks off?

#### **B. It is the church's responsibility to protect and promote sound teaching.**

- one of the delightful ways the church is described in Scripture is...
- **1 Timothy 3:14-15 - I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.**
- see, as all these ideas are coming at us – we have to figure out ways to discern what God's Will truly is...how do we practically function as the pillar and support of the truth?...
- now, one of the upshots is...

#### **C. This is why teachers will face greater judgment.**

**James 3:1 - Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.**

- in this internet age with Twitter and FB and blogging and the ability to post comments on news stories and on and on...men and women are often very careless in the way they put their ideas out there...
- that should never be true in the church...
- what these Judaizers was doing was reckless...by the way...

#### **D. This is why we place so much emphasis on education.**

- if we are going to be the pillar and support of the truth...we have to promote study and learning...
- there is a reason why we positioned the MRC right inside our front door...that is there to communicate a message...
- we want our staff and teachers to be well trained...
- when I came here – I had been matriculated in some school somewhere every semester from the day I entered kindergarten until the day I walked in here at age 27...
- we encouraged Pastor Dutton to get his doctorate while he was here...
- Pastor Garner received an advanced degree in Christian Education...
- Scott Grass in Christian school administration...
- we have all kinds of people working on them right now
- Pastor Aucoin – PhD in OT, Pastor Green – PhD in NT,
- Pastor Curtis – Masters in Worship Ministry...Pastor Woodall – Masters in Mental Health (to bolster our work in community ministries...)
- Jocelyn Wallace – Masters in Mental Health
- Heather Starkweather – our Social Worker at VOH – actually working right now on two degrees...an MABC and a Masters in Social Work...
  
- that's why all morning long we will over all sorts of education options for all sorts of people...
- the same is true on Wednesday nights with FCI...and all our small groups...
- **2 Timothy 2:15 - Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.**
- and one of the questions I would ask you this morning is, do you understand that because there will always be competing voices out there, and as a result you are taking concrete steps right now to bolster your understanding of God's Word?...
  
- now let's take the next logical step...how was this resolved?...what steps were taken so the church didn't implode? [didn't get its block knocked off]?

## **II. The Church Family Decided How God's Will Should be Determined.**

- It is crucial to carefully observe the process that was followed in this situation...
- the church family came together and figured this out...that's the summary of everything we're seeing...
- and ultimately we should praise Christ who is clearly building His church and empowering these men and women to do the right thing...
- as a body...this is Living Life Together at its best...

### **A. "The brethren determined" – v. 2**

- and depending on what translation of the Bible you have in front of you – those words may or may be inserted...but that is clearly the point...
- this logjam needed to be broken...and instead of everyone dividing up and splitting...they decided it was time for a church council to be called...that's what this passage is about – the great Jerusalem council...
- the church family decided that was the best course of action in this situation...so this group was...

### **B. "Sent by the church" – v. 3**

- see, it's the exact same thing we saw last week...

- when it was time for the beginning of Christian missionary movement...God used the local church at Antioch to send out the first missionaries...the church was used to do that...
- and here we are again – when a significant issue arises – and there needs to be some way of determining God's will in the matter – the Lord again uses His church...

### **C. This is why our church family does strategic planning together.**

- how does a group of people figure out what steps God wants us to take together?...
- and there are at least two bad answers to that question...
- one – we don't have a plan...
  - and that is true of too many congregations – they haven't taken time to figure out what they believe God's specific will is for them at any given period of time...
  - I don't know what you think about that – but I know for me, I would never want to be part of a church unless there was a very specific plan in place for what the group believed God wanted them to do...otherwise by default there will be a huge waste of resources with very little progress toward a goal...
- the other bad answer is – the plan was determined by a small group of people who put it together and then announced it, or presented it, or foisted it on the people of God in the spirit of "here it is, get happy about it".
- that is disrespecting the place of the church family in the discernment of God's specific will...
- now, here's a couple of take-aways from that one...
  - I would encourage you to have a copy of our current 5 year plan {copies available at the Welcome Center or on-line}...and that you are reviewing it regularly and praying about what we're trying to do...
  - I would also encourage you to think about – if this is what our church family determined was God's will for us during this period of time, what am I doing to help us accomplish these initiatives
  - because otherwise, isn't it somewhat disrespectful to the church family to have them/us discern God's will and then not take steps to help the family accomplish what we said we believed His will was for us?...
- I would encourage you to already be thinking about the development of the next plan...
  - I know that might make some people groan...but we actually have 2 years left on this plan...which means we'll start working on the development of the next one in the last year of the current one...[a little over a year from now...]
- and we'll be looking to get our church family involved in that in as many ways as possible...
  - surveys, focus groups, congregational meetings...
  - and right now you could begin praying and dreaming and brainstorming ways you believe the Lord might want us to advance the ball in the coming years...
  - that's one of the lessons of this text...they had to figure out God's will...and they did it together...
- I cannot stress enough how that unifies a group of people...

- see, strong unity is what keeps the head on the robot even when it takes a licking from time to time...
- **Ephesians 4:1-3 - Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**
- discerning God's will together is part of what makes that happen...
- that's one of the reasons there's so much buzz right now about Faith West...
  - we can point to our plan...that we devised together...several years ago now, and said that we believed God's Will for our church family was to purchase a piece of property as close to the Purdue Campus as possible and build a Student Ministry Center and Biblical Counseling Center to be a place where students, faculty, and staff could be exposed to God and His Word...
  - well, now it would appear that God is allowing that dream to become a reality...possibly in some ways we would not have fully envisioned at the time...[which is the way the Lord often works...]
  - and the next step is to make commitments for this three year capital campaign for 2012-2014...
  - Arvid has done a great job on explaining the project in this brochure...the information is available on-line...
    - and now we are asking every person attending our church to make a generous, sacrificial, and timely commitment to this project that we all said we believed was God's will for us...
    - please tell me by the way that you came prepared to do that today...
      - you picked up your brochure last week or you went on-line...
      - we've been talking about this for well over a year...
      - did you make your commitment today?...
      - because here's what we want to avoid – commitments that are tokenistic or last minute...
      - stretch yourself – just like you do when you buy a new TV at your house
      - the way you order fries at the fast food place...
  - let's live life together in a way that is worthy of the name we've chosen for our church...
  - now, one more important observation...

### **III. Every Person on the Team Had a Role to Play.**

#### **A. The apostles.**

- the Scriptures had not yet been completed...
- and we are at a point in church history where there were still people capable of being qualified for that office – that's not true today unless someone here wants to claim to have seen the risen Christ [one of the biblical requirements for an apostle]

#### **1. Came together – v. 6**

- that in and of itself is a sign of maturity...
- we're not going to avoid the problem...
- we're not going to divide up and take our doctrinal ball and go home...

#### **2. Debated – v. 7**

- there's nothing wrong with a vigorous and passionate exchange of ideas as long as biblical principles are followed

### **3. Reasoned according to the Scriptures – 7-12**

- Peter explained how God called him to go to the Gentiles and this whole issue of Gentiles being freely admitted into the family of God by grace alone—which was so troubling to the Judaizers...
- Peter had clear evidence – those steps were taken in obedience to the Word of God...
- and the Lord didn't say anything about circumcision or any other Mosaic law being necessary for admission into God's family...
- **Acts 15:11 - But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are.**
- because the church was being the church, important doctrinal ideas were being clarified...

### **4. The people listened**

- v. 12 – **All the people kept silent...**
- there's a beautiful balance here between vigorous communication and debate earlier – but now it's time to be led...it's perfect...
- but there's someone else involved...it's Pastor James – the pastor of the church at Jerusalem...

### **B. The pastor**

- 1. Addressed them respectfully**
  - v. 13 – **Brethren**
  - see, there wasn't anything condescending about this...they were having a family discussion in the very best sense of the Word...
- 2. Explained his position on the basis of Scripture.**
  - **Acts 15:15 - “With this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written,**
  - that's exactly what a pastor should have done...

### **C. The church.**

- 1. “with the whole church” – v. 22**
- 2. “to choose men among them and to send” – v. 22**
- 3. “and they sent this letter” – v. 23**