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FOUNDATIONAL ISSUES:

Church: Goals of

What goals should the church strive for?

As one thinks about the topic, goals of the church, many thoughts may come to mind. Some may think about such things as the number of people a church wants to see come to Christ in the coming year; how many small groups should be meeting each week; when the new church building will be built; how much money should be designated to support missionaries, etc. Therefore, each church will have its own set of goals depending upon its circumstances. Though many churches strive toward excellent goals such as those mentioned above, presented here is the premise that there is a biblical set of goals which are to be of primary importance above all others. Though these goals are to be fundamental to everything which the church does if it is to experience success, these goals are rarely discussed in a strategic manner in most church board meetings around the world. The question is, "How would a church determine which set of goals are of primary importance for the church to follow, and which are not?"

As one considers which goals would qualify as the primary goals of the church, some criteria should be considered. The first criterion presented to determine if a goal is a primary goal of the church or not is: Does this goal produce eternal results? In other words, when this goal is realized, or even in the process of being realized (when a long process is in view), it will have results that will be recognized in eternity. Eternal goals are of course something worthwhile for a church to strive after. A second criterion presented is that such a goal would be commanded in the Scriptures for churches to fulfill. Since obedience to the Word of God is of utmost importance, this too would make the goal worthwhile. A third criterion presented is that such a goal would be discussed in many places in the epistles, where churches would be exhorted to follow and excel in this goal. The next question is: "Are there New Testament exhortations which would fulfill these criteria, and if so, what are they?" The answer to this question is found in the book of 1 Corinthians and corroborated in other epistles.

The church's primary goals:

In the book of 1 Corinthians, it is evident that the Corinthian believers struggled with the sin of pride (cf. 1:26-31; 4:6, 18, 19; 5:2; 8:1-2). In conjunction with this, they as a church possessed all of the spiritual gifts which are given by the Holy Spirit (1:7); and for some, this added to their pride (12:21; 13:1-2; 14:4,23). Therefore the Apostle Paul needed to correct them and let them know that there were things more important in life than the spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 13:1-3; cf. 1 Sam. 15:21-23). These spiritual gifts in which the Corinthians prided themselves would one day cease (1 Cor. 13:8). But in contrast to these gifts, what wouldn't cease? What was more important and eternal? Paul clearly answers this question when he exhorts the Corinthians with these words found in 1 Corinthians 13:13: "But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love." These three aspects of the Christian faith are what Paul tells the Corinthians are the most important, and will remain, existing on into eternity (what will "abide," or stay forever in contrast to the gifts which have and will cease (vs. 8)). Faith, hope and love are also themes about which Paul speaks repeatedly to the recipients of his epistles. They are foundational to all other aspects of a believer's, or his church's faith and ministry. Therefore, whenever these three aspects of the faith are not foundational to a church's existence, then everything that such a church does will be done in the strength of their own flesh and not in the strength of the Spirit of God (cf. Rev. 2:2-5). Consequently, this is why the three primary goals that a church should focus its attention on are faith, hope and love¹.

Why are these three aspects of a believer's faith so important? In the case of love, Jesus stated when asked which is the greatest commandment in the Law: "... 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind' is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets'" (Matthew 22:37-40). From Jesus' answer, two major observations are noted. The first is that the two greatest commandments in Scripture are to love God and man. The second observation is that all of the Law of Moses (613 individual commandments) find their foundation in love. Romans 13:8-10 sums this truth up when it says: "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled *the* law. For this, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,' and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of *the* law." Therefore everything that a person does is to be done out of love. This is also to be the goal of our preaching and teaching. Paul makes this point in 1 Timothy 1:5: "But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." What is the source of that love according to Paul? It is to come from a pure heart, a good conscience and a sincere faith. How do you as a pastor positively influence the hearts of the members of your church to be pure, resulting in a good conscience and a sincere faith? It is through your teaching and preaching ministries, for it is the Word of God which sanctifies (John 17:17; 15:3) and cleanses (Eph. 5:26; cf. Heb. 10:22), which is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be

¹The author was first introduced to this understanding of the Scriptures through the ministry of Dr. Gene A. Getz. Though this being the case, the material on this topic results from the author's own personal study.

adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16). Therefore love must be the foundational aspect or goal of the local church; for if it is not, as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13, the results of the various ministries of the church will be of no profit (1 Cor. 13:1-3). Love is of utmost importance in the local church.

The second goal of the church is to grow in faith. Hebrew 11:6 states: "And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him." If a church does not function in accordance with faith, then how can that church possibly please God? It cannot and will not! God will only reward those individuals and churches who seek Him. Those who seek their own will may please themselves and others, but they definitely will not please God. Therefore the local church must do everything through faith and not the flesh, or it will not produce good and lasting fruit (Mark 4:18-19).

The third foundational goal about which Paul exhorted the church at Corinth is hope. Hebrews 6:19 says: "This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a *hope* both sure and steadfast..." Therefore hope is important in the local church because without it the church would waver. It would have no firm foundation. As a result, it would not be a pure church which would labor and strive for the gospel, being tossed to and fro because of its lack of stability. But the church whose hope is in Christ (Col. 1:27) purifies itself (1 John 3:3; cf. Titus 2:11-14) and will be useful to God (2 Tim. 2:20-22). Such a church will also be anchored (cf. Heb. 6:19), and as a result will be steadfast (Heb. 6:19; 1 Thes. 1:3) and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that their toil is not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58). Even in the midst of trials (cf. 1 Thes. 1:3,6; 2 Thes. 1:4), such a church will persevere (Rom. 8:25). This stability, which is a manifestation of hope, gives the church the ability to labor and strive (1 Tim. 4:10), making an impact for Christ. Accompanying such hope is rejoicing (Rom. 12:12), and no disappointment (Rom. 5:4-5) because of Whom the church's hope is in. This is why hope is so important and is to be a foundational goal of the church.

The importance of these goals:

As one looks at the writings of Paul, one can see Paul's concern for how the churches he began manifested faith, hope and love. The books of 1 & 2 Thessalonians and Colossians show this point very clearly. Below is an example from 1 & 2 Thessalonians:

1 Thessalonians

Paul remembered their faith, hope and love (1:3)

They expressed their faith (evangelism) (1:8)

Paul gave examples of how they expressed their faith, hope and love (1:9-10)

Timothy was sent to strengthen them in their faith (3:2)

Paul sent Timothy to find out about their faith (3:5)

Timothy brought good news about their faith and love (3:6)

Paul was comforted after hearing about their faith (3:7)

Paul wanted to complete what was lacking in their faith (3:10)

Paul wanted them to abound in their love (3:12)

They were taught by God to love one another (4:9)

Paul exhorted them to put on faith, hope and love (5:8)

2 Thessalonians

Paul commended them because their faith and love grew (1:3)

Paul spoke proudly of them to others because of their steadfastness (perseverance) and faith in persecution (1:4)

Paul prayed for their growth in love and hope (steadfastness) (3:5)

In these two short books one can see the importance of faith, hope and love by the number of times Paul mentions them (14 times in 8 chapters). One can also see their importance by Paul's concern for the manifestation of these three aspects of their faith in this church. Paul reminded them of their faith, hope and love in the past, in the present, and his desire for them to improve in these areas in the future. Then in 2 Thessalonians, it is obvious that they did make strides forward in their faith and love. Not only that, Paul spoke proudly of them because of their steadfastness (perseverance) and faith in persecution (1:4). It is interesting to note that these are the kinds of things about which the Apostle Paul boasted. Therefore faith, hope and love are measuring sticks for the health of the local church.

Seeing the importance of faith, hope and love in the life of a believer and in the life of a church, these aspects of the faith need to be a priority for discussion by church leadership. In these discussions, they need to analyze their church and its ministries to see if faith, hope and love are truly its foundational characteristics; if they are being manifested to the extent they should be, or to see if any of them are nonexistent (cf. Rev. 2:4). The church's leadership also needs to consider how the church, individuals within the church, and they themselves can work at abounding even more in their faith, hope and love. When meeting to discuss the work of the church, its leadership needs to make sure that their meetings are carried out in a spirit which expresses these characteristics, and that the decisions made reflect them as well.

In this world there are churches which are monuments to men, and there are those which are monuments to God. Those which are monuments to men are the ones that operate like corporations, where planning and scheming are done on how to build up a large church through whatever means are necessary. Those which are monuments to God are those which manifest a great faith in Him, which look forward to Christ's coming with steadfastness, and which manifest love in all that they do toward the brethren and to those outside of the church. These churches also plan, desiring to reach the lost, but they grow, not because they are doing things in their own strength and strategy, but because they are obedient to the Word of God. In their obedience, they strive to manifest to the greatest extent their faith, their hope and their love. Not only that, but these three qualities are seen in all that they do: in their evangelism, in their worship, in their service, in their care of others, etc. These are the churches which God blesses. These are the churches which make an impact for Christ. These are the churches which grow, both spiritually and numerically. Therefore the manifestation of faith, hope and love in the local church and its members should become as natural as breathing is to a living creature. May your church be such a church.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS:



1. In this section it was stated that the three main goals which the church is to strive after are faith, hope and love. Do you really believe that these are the three primary ways in which the Apostle Paul measured the health of a church? Please explain your answer.

2. Why do you see faith, hope and love as being so important to the operation of the local church?

3. Please explain why faith, hope and love are crucial to an effective outreach program to the community which surrounds your church?

4. Have you ever discussed with other church leaders how to encourage the members of your church to grow in these three areas individually? Have you discussed how your church can grow in these three areas as a whole?

5. What are some ways in which your church leaders can encourage growth in:
 - Faith

- Hope

- Love

6. What are ways in which you can grow personally in these areas?

7. Who stands out in your mind as a great (list 3 different people):

- Person of faith?
- Person of hope?
- Person of love?

8. Who do you personally know, or knew, who was a great (list 3 different people):

- Person of faith?

- Person of hope?

- Person of love?

Please list one specific aspect of their character about each of the people you listed above that makes you think this way. What can you learn from them which you can implement in your own life?

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS FOR CROSS-CULTURAL MISSIONARIES AND CHURCH PLANTERS:

1. Are faith, hope and love character qualities that are evident in your own life and family? If not, then how will you be able to teach them by example to your members and instill them in their lives?

2. How will you ensure that your new church will embody faith, hope and love from its conception? List some ideas below.

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3. What are ministries which can be started in your church and in the community in which it will be planted that will embody faith, hope and love?

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