

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 1-12-14 AM NOTES
"THE CHURCH: A HOUSEHOLD, A BODY, AND A COMMUNITY"
VARIOUS SCRIPTURES
#2 in Series, "Growing Small"

Acts 2:46 (NIV) "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts."

Hebrews 10:24-25 (NASB) "²⁴ and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near."

Our relationships with one another in the church are to be covenantal and not contractual.

Malachi 2:14b (ESV) "But you say, '... she is your companion and your wife by covenant.'"

I. The Church Is a Household

Galatians 6:10 (NKJV) "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith."

Galatians 6:10b (NIV) "...those who belong to the family of believers."

1 Timothy 3:15 (ESV) "if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth."

When you join a church, you are joining a family.

Ephesians 2:19 (NKJV) "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God."

Romans 15:7 (NASB) "Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God."

II. The Church Is a Body

1 Corinthians 12:13-14 (NKJV) “¹³ For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free--and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. ¹⁴ For in fact the body is not one member but many.”

God has wired us so that we not only need Him, we need one another.

1 Corinthians 12:25 (NASB) “so that there may be no division in the body, but *that* the members may have the same care for one another.”

Romans 12:4-6 (NASB) “⁴ For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, ⁵ so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶ Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, *each of us is to exercise them accordingly*: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith.”

III. The Church Is a Community

Acts 2:44-47 (NASB) “⁴⁴ And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ and they *began* selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. ⁴⁶ Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

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#2 in Series, “Growing Small”

I know that the title of this series (“Growing Small”) is an oxymoron (a phrase in which two words of contradictory meaning are used together for special effect). However I believe that “growing small” is where God is leading us. Last week using the early church in Acts as a model, we saw that a church ministers to and equips its members by having large group worship and small group gatherings for a deepening fellowship. **Acts 2:46 (NIV)** “Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts.

They broke bread in their **homes** and ate together with glad and sincere hearts”. We saw that the temple courts were just a place that would handle large gatherings. They met in homes because that is the only place they could meet in small groups. The Apostles knew that both of these were important, I would even say **essential** to making disciple making disciples. We have called those two gathering places the congregation (large worship and teaching) and the cell (small groups). The point of this series is that as a church grows larger and larger in their worship gatherings, they must proportionally grow in the small groups (Sunday School, Life Groups, home groups, and at the church building at a time other than Sunday AM). Hence the title: “Growing Small”. It is much easier to grow the congregation than it is to grow the cells. Much of what looks like growth in the congregation is not genuine growth in discipleship. When the music is excellent, the preacher is a good communicator, and a good marketing plan is followed, people will come and they will come by the hundreds and in large population areas, by the thousands. After a while as people “sit, soak, and sour” the services lose some of their appeal and people are left with the nagging sense that there has to be something more. It is primarily in the small groups that people make relationships and are encouraged and equipped in discipleship. **Hebrews 10:24-25 (NASB)** “²⁴ and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.” I submit to you that this happens more in small groups than in the “worship services”.

I don't want to be vague as to what my main purpose is for sharing this series with you. I want you to get in a small group! I want some of you to get into training opportunities to lead a small group! If you are in a small group that is not equipping you in ministry and fostering growing relationships, I want you to be able to find one that is or stay where you are and begin setting an example of what a small group should be doing.

Let me say a word to those of you who would say, “The reason I don't go to a small group is because I've been!” Maybe you found it boring, the people unfriendly, and it just didn't do anything for you. I would say to you that maybe you've approached church in general and small groups in particular with a consumer's mindset which is self-centered. Our relationships with one another in the church are to be **covenantal** and not **contractual**. Let me illustrate the difference between covenantal and contractual by using marriage as an example. Marriage is a covenant, not a contract. **Malachi 2:14b (ESV)** “...though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.” A covenant is a promise that depends on the faithfulness of the one making the covenant; a contract is when both parties make a commitment and when one party doesn't come through, the other can get out of the contract because it has been broken. Think of the wedding vows. Does it say, “I take you as my wedded wife / husband for better, richer, and in health until you disappoint me at which time I will part”? No, that would be a contract. A covenant marriage says, “I take you for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness or health, until death do us part.” Your relationship with the church is compared to marriage in Ephesians 5. It may be that you tried a small group here or at another church and the whole format was not to your liking. Try another one here that is different. There are some that are led by master teachers who do in depth study of books or portions of books of the Bible. It is not that there is no discussion, but the discussion is minimal. If those classes are going to be strong in fellowship, they must grow smaller as they grow in number by having active care groups that minister to needs, have fellowship together throughout the year. There are other classes that are smaller. The teacher prepares well, but the style is more participatory and the teacher is guiding the discussion and making sure the conclusions are biblical and no one dominates. There are some classes that meet on different nights of the week and in late January we hope to have several that will be meeting in homes. When you find a class that fits your style of learning, you make a covenant commitment and jump in with both feet and when it isn't going well, you set out to be a part of the solution and not the complainer who says “I'm out of here because I'm just not connecting”. Why don't you become the connector aggressor!

This covenant approach is really the whole church, not just the small groups. If you have the contract mindset, you will say, “I hate parking so far away; nobody has even greeted me; they don't even have a coffee bar.” The covenant approach says, “I'm in good health so I'll get the far away parking in the North

40 so others can have the closer parking; our church is not the friendliest church in the world, so I'm going to raise the bar and find 10 people to greet and get to know a little about them; no one has invited me out so for the next several weeks I am going to invite a couple to my home; I could use some encouragement with the week I've been through, but no one has encouraged me; I'm going to raise the bar and find 3 people each week to encourage." Do you see the difference? One is the consumer, contract approach of the world. The other is the covenant approach of Scripture.

If you have been around long enough, you know that I delight in the preaching of the great preacher of London over 100 years ago, Charles Spurgeon. Spurgeon used a phrase in a message on the church that just deeply resonated with me and warmed my heart. In the midst of talking about the problems in the church and the shortcomings of all churches, Spurgeon described the church as "The dearest place on earth". To that I would say a hearty "AMEN!" I love the church; I love this church. It is far from perfect and it has far from perfect Elders leading it. However, there is so much going on – especially through the small groups. In spite of our flaws, the church, **this church, is the dearest place on earth**. I am so invested here that I will not forsake it or reject those who fail. I will be an encourager and I will be God's instrument of peace in lives where there is turmoil. Guess what; when you keep running off to another church chasing "the ideal church myth", at # 4 or #5 you will make a big discovery: Every church is flawed and you will never be satisfied with a "contract" approach to fellowship and so make this the place that you discover that the church is the dearest place on earth despite the fact that it is populated by and led by flawed people. I can guarantee you that you will be disappointed here, let down, slighted, and offended. That will be true anywhere. These are God's spiritual growth enhancers and you can learn to love like Jesus loves only when you are disappointed and hurt as He was hurt. Determine that with the church and with the small group you choose to invest your life in that you are going to grind it out and be in there for the duration. There is a lost world to reach with the Gospel and it's not about you and your preferences and your expectations. It is about God and His glory and when He becomes your focus, it is amazing how everything seems to just come into focus.

Certainly there are reasons to leave a church. I shared some good biblical reasons in a message a few months ago. A few reasons I would suggest are:

- Abusive Leadership – Leadership that doesn't listen and even "punishes" those who question anything
- No preaching of the Word from the pulpit
- Unrepentant immorality among the leaders
- Resistance to any financial accountability on the part of the leadership
- Little or no emphasis on the Great Commission
- No opportunities to serve

That is certainly not an exhaustive list. Notice that all of these are **violations of clear biblical principles** and none are about personal preferences and personal disappointments and inconveniences.

For the remainder of this message, I want to look at three metaphors for the church. A metaphor is simply one thing used or considered to represent another. Two of these three metaphors are named in the Scripture and the third is described, but the word isn't used. What we will see is that most of these metaphors are fleshed out in the small groups.

The biblical metaphors that God uses to describe the church are very important since they each describe something about the church in a context that we can more easily understand. For instance, to describe the church as a family or household speaks about its relational closeness and our shared identity. To call the church a body is to teach us that every part of the church is important and we are mutually dependent on one another even though we have different roles. When we use the metaphor of a community it shows that when we join a church we move from "me" to "we". Let's look briefly at these three metaphors and make special application to the small groups in the church.

I. The Church Is a Household

Galatians 6:10 (NKJV) “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” The NIV translation says in **Galatians 6:10b (NIV)** “...those who belong to the family of believers.” We see this metaphor used again in **1 Timothy 3:15 (ESV)** “if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.” Putting these two together we see that the church is not only the place where people of faith dwell (“household of faith”); it is also where God in a special way dwells (“household of God”). When you join a church, you are joining a family. We have the same Father and we have experienced the same spiritual birth. Our relationship in the church transcends ethnic groups, and earthly families. Even Jew and Gentile are united in the church. **Ephesians 2:19 (NKJV)** “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God”.

For some of us, that metaphor of the church being a family brings about warm fuzzy feelings because we came from a good family. For others it causes you to shiver in almost disgust because of the earthly biological family you had. What you must see is that the church is the place you can finally experience what real family is meant to be.

Where do the manifestations of a biblical family show themselves more clearly – in a large room that seats about 1,000 or in a small group meeting in a home or a small group meeting in a smaller room in the church building? The early church realized that as the household of God you draw nearer when you are together more than on just Sunday for about an hour and a half. If we stimulate one another to love and good works on Sunday (Hebrews 10:24), why not on other days in the week? This family metaphor has seemingly no end to application when looking at the church. When an individual member of a family has a legitimate need, the other members of the family jump in and help him. When the seeming need is because of poor, even sinful choices, family members correct without fear of the guilty party leaving the family. This metaphor is the background of addressing fellow church members as “brother” and “sister”. I think we could stand to bring some of that back! You don’t forsake your earthly family because a brother or sister hurt your feelings or confronted you. Families don’t do that and the church is the household or family of God. Families stand with one another against enemies. That seems to be natural. One of my earliest memories as a child was walking home from church one summer Sunday evening with my little brother. I was about 11 or so and he was 8 or 9. My dad was working and Mom didn’t feel well so we walked the ½ mile or so to the church (those were different days!). As we got within sight of home the Jennings brothers came out from behind a building. There was about 25-30 of them – Ok maybe it was 2 or 3. They announced their intention to beat us up. I engaged the Jennings boys and told my brother to go get Mom. When they saw that I was really going to take them on they quickly left. I can still see my sick mother in a sprint form worthy of an Olympic sprinter coming to my rescue. That’s what family does!

When it comes to family, everyone has to contribute. There are no slackers in the family (at least that was true in the family I grew up in and the one I led as the father of the home. The church member who only wants to show up each week and not contribute by using their time, money, and spiritual gifts are like a child who only comes home to eat and sleep and refuses to share with and relate to the other family members. The church is the family of God and that is not the way a church is supposed to work. If time allowed we could draw all sorts of applications to this concept of the church being the household of God. A family accepts one another. **Romans 15:7 (NASB)** “Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.” Family members don’t run off and join another family when there are problems; they deal with the problems and grow through them. I will leave the further applications to you as you meditate on this metaphor for the church. This family concept is demonstrated most clearly in small groups.

II. The Church Is a Body

1 Corinthians 12:13-14 (NKJV) “¹³ For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free--and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. ¹⁴ For in fact the body is not one member but many.” The body is the most common metaphor Paul uses for the church in

the epistles God inspired him write. No member of the body can flourish when it is disconnected from the rest of the body. God has wired us so that we not only need Him, we need one another. There are no Lone Rangers or independent operators in the church – the body of Christ. **1 Corinthians 12:25 (NASB)** “so that there may be no division in the body, but *that* the members may have the same care for one another.” Just as the human body is interconnected even so the church, the body of Christ is interconnected. When one part of the body hurts, the other parts join in with the afflicted part in its affliction. Rather than attacking the hurting part, the rest of the body gets to work to compensate for the injured part.

The whole concept of spiritual gifts is presented to us in the context of the body. Just as each part of the physical body has its function, even so every member of the church has their own spiritual gift that is needed by the body. **Romans 12:4-6a (NASB)** “⁴For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, ⁵so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, *each of us is to exercise them accordingly...*” 1 Corinthians 12 :12-31 uses humor as well as logic to make the point that just as there is diversity in the human body in order that the body functions smoothly together, even so in the church, the body of Christ. Just as the human body receives its direction from the head and obeys what the head tells it to do, even so the church receives its direction from the head, which is Christ. Do you see how this “body concept” works its way out best in the small group setting? It is primarily in the small groups that spiritual gifts are recognized and carried out.

III. The Church Is a Community

Although the New Testament doesn't use the word “community” referring to the church, the imagery of community shows up in a number of places. What do we mean by community? Community typically denotes a group of people who have something in common. For instance we may speak of a farming community, the academic community referring to those around a university, or a place where an ethnic group has settled (the Italian community or the German community). Community is a setting where we have much in common with others who live there. The clearest example of community is in Acts 2:44-47. In this passage, we see a people who had just come to know Christ and were indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Many had come to Jerusalem from far away to be at the feast of Pentecost. When the Spirit came and thousands were being saved many needed to be disciplined and yet there was the matter of living expenses. **Acts 2:44-47 (NKJV)** “⁴⁴Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, ⁴⁵and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. ⁴⁶So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, ⁴⁷praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” That's a picture of community. Community is best lived out through a small group – not exclusively through a small group, but primarily through a small group. It is in that group that we can be open and honest and vulnerable with one another. It is within the small group that encouragement and admonishment may be meted out.

CONCLUSION

Truly Mr. Spurgeon was right: the church is the dearest place on earth! The church is the household (family) of God, the body of Christ, and the community of the committed. Are you experiencing the fellowship described in this message? It may be that you are an introvert, a loner who has no felt need for what I am talking about this morning. You need the church whether you feel that need or not. You need to be in a small group whether you feel a need or not. There are others in the body of Christ who need you, your spiritual gift, and your life experience. Some of you are not even committed to a specific church. A covenant relationship has a formal commitment about it – for example the marriage ceremony. It's time for you to be plugged in and say “I do” to this church family.