

Four Distinctives

- 1 Timothy 3:14-16
- I heard a speaker 5 or 6 years ago say something very interesting to the 20 pastors gathered in the room. He said that what we value as a church will be the determining factor for our products and practices, in other words, what we do and what we produce. Our goal as a church is to produce maturing disciples of Jesus Christ, so what we value will affect that in a strong way. How do we know what we value? The speaker listed 5 questions to consider.
- #1. What do we measure? (remember the old boards on the wall in front of the church? What did they tell you from the week before?)
- #2. How do the leaders respond to crisis?
- #3. What do the leaders model and teach?
- #4. How do we allocate scarce resources?
- #5. What behavior do we (really) reward?" So, what do we do with this information? I think we evaluate the life of our church, to see if what we value are the same things Jesus taught and modeled for His disciples: they will be matters of the heart, matters of character, development of leaders who know how to lay down their lives, development of strong families led by godly fathers, compassion for the lost, and wisdom that is anchored in the Word.
- Let me remind you about four things that I think we highly value at Antioch. As I taught the last round of New Members' classes, I shared with them, as I have for years, what I believe are four distinctives that contribute to Antioch being a healthy, biblical church. I would like to go through those today with you, so that we can all be reminded of what we are about. Let me hasten to say that these are not distinctives for us in the sense that no one else is doing these or believes these. Not at all. We know we are not the 'only one' and we must never presume that we are doing it all right and everybody else has problems. But because the household of God is the church of the living God, Christians need to think clearly and biblically about what the church believes and lives out. As we saw in the text today, the church stands solely upon the Gospel, which Paul summarizes in poetic fashion in verse 16: "He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory." That's the foundation upon which everything we do rests. There is no other foundation except Jesus Christ. Upon that foundation, we build in the following four ways.
- **Biblical Worship**
- Jesus said to the woman at the well, "The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship Him." (John 4:23) Worshipping God in spirit and in truth is biblical worship, and that's what we want to do here every time we gather, and what we want to encourage and teach everyone here to do wherever we are. Worship is not confined to a place or a set time in the week. We exist to worship God daily and we are committed to growing in that when we gather here on Sunday. Worship is not confined to singing songs either to or about God, but that is certainly an important part of worship. But our corporate worship starts every Sunday when we walk in the door, and doesn't end until we walk out!
- We worship Him in spirit. There's freedom here to worship the Lord as the Spirit of God leads. One comment I constantly hear from people who come to Antioch for the first time is how much they love the singing, and that the people, including the men, are singing with all their hearts. There is freedom here to lift your hands to the Lord, or to choose not to lift your hands. Either is fine, as long as we are lifting our hearts to Him. We have had a short list of worship leaders in our 30 years, really only about 4 men, and each one has felt the freedom to lead us in singing in his own way. But each has encouraged us to worship God with all our might, and for that we are grateful. Another freedom to worship God is on display every Sunday when we pass around a microphone and give anyone in here an opportunity to worship the Lord by encouraging the rest of us with a

testimony. Or a thanksgiving. I have had other church leaders tell me over and over through the years, when they hear that we do this every Sunday, that it sounds crazy. Aren't you afraid someone will take advantage of that and start talking and never stop? Or what if someone says something just plain wrong or even unbiblical? I always say, "The greater danger is not allowing for it at all, because you are training the church to believe that the Sunday morning service is a spectator sport. It's for the 'trained professionals,' and instead of coming to the service on Sunday ready to serve or to share, if the Lord allows, you come ready ONLY to sit and listen." Paul said in 1 Cor. 14 something about this, that whenever we come together, EACH ONE has something ready to share. As we learn to hear the Lord's voice, then we know whether we should take the mic that morning and share, or not. We can trust the Lord to lead us.

- We worship Him in truth. This applies to everything we do and say here, but it especially applies to what is preached. That's the next distinctive we hold onto at Antioch:
- **Expository preaching**
- Someone posted a funny video called "Church Hunting" this week, and the young couple 'shopping' for a church that would meet their every need told the guide at a 6,000 seat church, "Yeah, we're looking for a sermon that would be just like a TED talk, with a bible verse." As many of you commented on that video, this is sad, but oh too true! Alistair Begg writes, "The absence of expository preaching is directly related to an erosion of confidence in the authority and sufficiency of Scripture."
- We are committed to expository preaching as the norm at Antioch. It doesn't mean we can never share a sermon that is more topical, like this one, but probably 45 weeks of the year, we are working our way through a book in the Bible, verse by verse. Why is that helpful? Because you are getting the milk and the meat of Scripture. Try just drinking milk and eating doughnuts for a month and see how that works out for you. Sounds like fun but it would make you sick. And weak. We need the meat and the vegetables that the Bible offers in every book to be spiritually healthy. Working through a book also gives us an understanding of the context from which each verse comes, the reason the author wrote the book, his intended audience, and how it fits into the whole of Scripture. Can you imagine a Chemistry professor teaching a textbook on chemistry by picking out parts of sentences at random and using them for his lectures? Working through a book also forces us to deal with the difficult issues. You can't preach through James without talking about prejudice. Or, about the rich exploiting the poor. Or, how we use our tongues to destroy other people. Sometimes the Bible confronts us and sometimes it upsets us. Tim Keller said this: "Only if your God can say things that upset you will you know you have a real God and not just a creation of your imagination. So an authoritative Bible (the point of contradiction) is not the enemy of a personal love relationship with God (the point of contact). It is the precondition."
- Paul spent three years in Ephesus, preaching and teaching. Remember when Paul met with the Ephesian elders a few years later, as he was on his way to Jerusalem? He said, "Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God." (Acts 20:26-27) I believe the whole counsel of God can best be declared through expository preaching. Tim Keller said it this way: "Expository preaching should provide the main diet of preaching for a Christian community. . . . [It] is the best method for displaying and conveying your conviction that the whole Bible is true. This approach testifies that you believe every part of the Bible to be God's Word, not just particular themes and not just the parts you feel comfortable agreeing with." One of the constant themes of Scripture is the missionary heart of God, and the call on every believer to make disciples, as Kevin reminded us last week. That leads to a third distinction of this church:
- **Commitment to Missions**
- As Kevin shared about his mission to El Salvador, he reminded us of Jesus' last words recorded in the book of Matthew: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name

of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Mt 28:19-20)

- We encourage every person at Antioch to be involved in missions in three ways: give, go, and send. I will combine give and send, since they work together. The easiest way is to give. For every DOLLAR you gave to Antioch in 2016, 33 cents of it was given to missions. One third of our budget goes to support 12 different local missions, 11 different foreign missions, and helping people get to the foreign mission field for a short-term trip, like the 9 who went to Mexico recently and will share with us next week. That’s the sending part: your giving helped to send people whom you KNOW to go and serve a single mom in Mexico by building her a house, or giving people medical care along with the Gospel in El Salvador. 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 nine will testify next week, 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. 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 ours 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!) 4. They open your heart and your pocket. (People who have been to the field want to give more)
- **Plurality of elders**
- Let me suggest five reasons why having a plurality of elders to lead the church is a strong ingredient for that church’s health. There’s much more about this at 9Marks.org, if you like.
- **Accountability.** Godly elders hold each other, including the pastor, accountable to live, teach, and lead faithfully. There is 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 establish a healthy body.
- **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 3.6 years. When Paul met with the elders of the Ephesian church, he said, “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which He obtained with His own blood.” (Acts 20:28) Then he said 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. Instead, it provides an example of maturity for every man and young man to follow.
- **What, then, do we value at Antioch?** I would say that we value a relationship with Jesus and each other above everything else. We value strong families led by godly men. We value solid singles who are seeking and serving the Lord. And we value these four distinctives: biblical worship, expository preaching, a commitment to missions, and a plurality of elders.
- **Prayer**