Lownes Free Church Sunday Morning – June 24, 2018

A Local Church. . .

God’s design of it

Jesus’ words to it

My place in it

Love and Accountability: A church is Christ’s Family

You have a Father, brothers, sisters, and relationships to pursue.

Matthew 18:1-20

 We’ve seen that a local church is the Body of Christ and His Flock. Just as important, His people are a spiritual family. When his mother and brothers heard that Jesus had chosen the Twelve, they resolved to save Him from His insanity (Mark 3:21). Jesus, upon hearing that they were outside, pointed to those around Him, and said, “Here are my mother and brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.” (Mark 3:34, 35) Let’s explore Jesus’ idea in His own words, and see how He applies this principle to our daily life.

***We are family! And that is more than mere words. . .***

✔ We are children of God. vv. 1-4 Children are the model of humility, vulnerability, and innocence. The disciples’ question about who is greatest in the Kingdom was totally missing the nature of both Kingdom and King.

✔ We protect the family. vv. 5-9 First, we accept one another rather than creating pitfalls, and second, we guard our own hearts against sin.

✔ We take joy in the family members. vv. 10-14 The parable of the lost sheep is applied to our everyday relationships: seeking the good of other children of God AND restoring them is what Jesus means by “not despising” them. The Pharisees looked down on sinners; God and His people love them.

✔ We forgive our brothers and sisters as we have been forgiven. vv. 15-20 The parable of the two stewards (vv. 21-35) illustrates this Kingdom principle: If we do not extend grace, grace has not transformed / rebirthed us.

***Our Father has provided a unique house for us.***

✔ By protecting and setting aside this property for the gospel.

✔ By granting us godly leadership for seventy years, including (only) four pastors, remarkable unity, and multi-generational leadership.

✔ By granting us a vision for proclaiming God’s Word, both here and to the nations, and dedicated men and women to carry out that vision.

✔ By generous members who over the years have tithed their incomes, given generously, and left us legacies so this work can continue and prosper.

***Applying the Principles to Church Membership***

**1. Our Father clearly designs and desires His children to be family.** It is impossible to overemphasize our need to be part of a fully functioning community of believers. We are to be close enough to others to assure that offences will occur and that they will be resolved.

**2. The world organizes itself differently from a true church.** Jesus is constantly reminding the disciples that their fellowship and His Kingdom are NOT about power, coercion, manipulation, or money. The leaders of an assembly are to be fatherly shepherds, not a CEO and Board of Directors. They are chosen and followed based upon their spiritual qualifications (First Timothy 3 and Titus 1), and not their popularity, prosperity, or personality.

**3. We will be all that Jesus calls us to be only if we are caring for one another and forgiving one another.** The Lord could have saved us and had us make the trip to Heaven alone. Instead, just as a child is born into a family, so a believer is born into God’s Kingdom-Family. Here we find not only our identity, but also a place to serve and follow Jesus’ model of laying down our lives for others. We do pray, “OUR Father. . .”

**4. Our personal passion must be an open-hearted love for God’s people, not a consumerism which asks only about “worship styles,” air conditioning, and what brand of coffee is served.** It is important to ask ourselves whether or not we are pouring our lives out in serving others, or just pursuing our own comfort and preferences.

**5. Church membership does not create love and accountability, but does make our commitment to one another clear and public.** Are you willing to be part of the spiritual family who takes this church into a new generation for the glory of God?